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ABSTRACT

Included in these proceedings are 11 essays by 12 specialists in the field of writing center administration. The first essay is the keynote address; the other essays are printed in the order in which they were presented at the conference. The papers discuss the following: (1) the writing center: a vision revisited; (2) from thought to word: learning to trust images; (3) providing practice and instruction in the writing center; (4) building cognitive skills for basic writers; (5) priorities and goals for the performance-based basic writer; (6) a practical approach to countering student resistance; (7) helping the reluctant student; (8) peer tutor training; (9) tutoring your tutors; (10) an innovative staffing program for writing centers; and (11) the benefits of tutorial work for tutors. (HOD)

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PROCEEDINGS OF THE SECOND ANNUAL SOUTHEASTERN WRITING CENTER CONFERENCE

held at

The University of Alabama

February 6, 1982

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PREFACE

Clearly, the Southeastern Writing Center Association is growing to be a strong organization with national representation. The second annual conference, held on February 6, 1982, featured speakers from nine states. The paper topics were as diverse as the types of writing centers these speakers represent.

Included in this Proceedings of the second annual Southeastern Writing Center conference are eleven essays by twelve specialists in the field of writing center administration. The first essay in this edition is the keynote address, given by Patricia Bates of Louisiana State University. The essays are printed in the order in which they were presented at the conference.

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Gary A. Olson
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The Writing Center: A Vision Revisited

Last summer about the time Gary and I began discussing this conference, I was in a period of personal and professional transition. Having a number of decisions to make about my future, I got into the habit of getting up and out while the rest of the world dozed contentedly. Before dawn each morning, I would stroll down to the end of my subdivision, where overgrown fields and woods were being staked off for new homes. There I would settle myself in the grass, mull over future prospects, and wait for the sun to come up as a signal to head back home.

One morning, in particular, I remember. My meditation over, I traced my way back along a tree-shaded bayou where lots were being readied for construction. At the nearest door fifty or so yards away, I saw a man, still in pajamas and robe, step out to get the morning paper. We faced each other in the dim light, he looking past me at the newly cleared adjacent lots, I still in my reverie and not so eager to head back home. He waved a hand in the direction of the bayou and noted, "This is really something, isn't it?" I responded with admiration, "It surely is." Then he tagged his reaction with: "It just makes me sick!"

Off and on for the rest of the day, I re-lived the surprise I felt over the fact that the same scene could elicit such opposing reactions. And since then I have become more aware of the surprising variety of attitudes with which people look at what we in writing centers are about. Let's look at that variety and see if some important lessons emerge from the disparity.

From many students' point of view, we in the writing center represent the LAST CHANCE--the last chance, that is, to be cured of the dreaded disease of illiteracy. They've been told that as far as the health of their reading and writing skills are concerned, they appear to be terminally ill and they'd better find a miracle cure fast or their opportunity for a college education will soon die! From some faculty members' viewpoint, we're the ones who offer the SPECIAL TREATMENT--the treatment they don't have the time, or in some cases, the inclination, to administer. (Experimental, they grant us, but worth a try.) Listen to some of our writing center colleagues at meetings like this and you'll hear the view that we're the PANACEA, the hope of the profession, the salvation of the age. No hyperbole seems too bold.

Then we hear the other extreme. According to some administrators, we're that costly remedy that's not really going to cure anybody, just another bit of unsightly evidence that there's a national epidemic they would like to claim their institution is immuned to. For some department heads and faculty, we're that mysterious lab down the hall where nobody really knows what's going on. At worst, we're the pariah that some students wouldn't dare be caught close to. Just being nearby might suggest that they themselves have some unmentionable social disease.

Who are we? Panacea or pariah? Neither, of course. We don't belong in the pathological paradigm at all, where some are trying to force us. Let's clear our vision, look at who we truly are, and see the direction in which we need to go.

From my viewpoint--and I believe it is a realistic one--we are part of the academic newly rich--rich in knowledge, opportunity, and responsibility. As Muriel Harris pointed out in her address at the third annual meeting of the Writing Centers Association last May, "We have an ideal teaching situation.

In a non-threatening, non-evaluative setting where we are coaches and helpers, not graders, we work with students more receptive to learning. We hear their real questions and know their real concerns--and we share their real successes as well." Professor Harris also noted the flexibility our individualized instruction provides. Teaching one student at a time in an informal setting, we can get instant feedback, finding out if a particular teaching strategy or a particular set of materials is failing to help a particular student; then we can make changes in order to get the results both we and the student want.

The writing center truly is a laboratory where we can test composing theories. We are proving the theorists correct as we see that the basics to stress at the beginning of the writing process are the elements of discourse and invention strategies. In other words, from the first, we talk about the roles of the writer and the reader; we talk to the students about their reasons for writing; we teach them how to find something to say. By beginning our instruction with a discussion of these functional elements, we are creating a holistic framework for subsequent instruction from which all students, no matter what their ability, should profit. And by serving as a living, breathing reacting audience, we in the lab help writers discover whether or not they have achieved their purpose. In short, we are proving the importance of teaching much more than just the visible, countable, testable elements of mechanical correctness traditionally associated with the study of "English," especially at the basic level. We've come a long way from the grammar drills and exercises we began many of our centers with.

Not only are we serving as a testing ground for others' theories; we are developing our own, and conducting extensive research to test those theories. A preview of several workshops to be a part of the upcoming special interest session for writing lab directors at 4 C's illustrates my point. Gary Olson

will be outlining the results of his research into the use of formal heuristics in the writing center. Jeanette Harris from East Texas State University will describe a new method for analyzing spelling errors that is proving effective in helping students concentrate on errors peculiar to their writing. Karen Spear, participating in this conference, will also be in San Francisco to explain her research using Bloom's taxonomy to help students gain greater writing control. Irene Clark from USC will present an experimental tutor-training method using the writing of hypothetical dialogues. Phyllis Brooks and Thom Hawkins of UC-Berkeley will describe cooperative teaching and research efforts as a means of bridging the gap between writing centers and academic departments. These are just a sampling of the kinds of exploration we are involved in.

As our knowledge increases in the writing center, there is a rippling effect, creating new opportunities for us to be heard outside our familiar domain. Let me use my own experience as an example. Two years ago, a split developed among the Louisiana Board of Regents concerning the fate of developmental education at the post-secondary level. Academic VP's from each college campus were asked to attend a meeting to launch a full-scale study of developmental education programs. Because of my work in the lab with basic writers, my academic vice-chancellor asked me to represent our institution. I became part of a task force that worked for the next two years, creating a developmental education model, of which writing labs are an integral part. Approving the model, the Board of Regents persuaded the state legislature to provide hundreds of thousands of dollars in extra funds to be shared among colleges and universities adopting the model. In the meantime, the Justice Department decided to incorporate it into an out-of-court desegregation settlement. Thus, because of my role as writing lab director, I had an opportunity

to help shape policies that could have far-reaching effects on developmental education in the state of Louisiana.

From this experience has come considerable knowledge about what is actually going on in developmental composition classrooms and how labs are being used. Frankly I am disturbed by the disparity between what I have observed and what we in writing centers have learned about the teaching of composition. And a nationwide writing-program-assessment project being conducted by a team of English professors at the University of Texas is showing that at least some of the practices in my state are typical of those throughout the country. At the developmental level, the level with which you and I are probably most intimately involved, there is still an overriding, if not exclusive, concern with surface correctness and the ability to name grammatical forms. Students are often placed into these developmental courses according to the number of mechanical errors made on a diagnostic essay: Three major mechanical errors puts this student into this course, and so on. Course descriptions normally begin with phrases like "vigorous review of grammar through drills," "intensive review of English grammar and usage as related to the structure of sentences," "fundamentals of English grammar," with the mention of "writing" being relegated to a prepositional phrase or the end of a coordinate clause, if at all. If writing is included, it is typically introduced toward the middle or the end of the semester. Only rarely is reading, speaking, and listening instruction integrated with writing instruction. Little wonder that on one syllabus all holidays were listed and followed by a string of exclamation marks.

In short, I am emphasizing the point that in spite of all we have learned about the composing process, too many developmental composition courses, for which we serve as adjuncts, continue to be narrowly conceived, with only

minimal attention being given to the integration of a variety of language skills and topics like invention, audience analysis, and writing as problem solving. Having examined rather carefully the Louisiana public school bulletin Minimum Standards of Writing, I see that many college instructors are continuing the doses of questionable worth that students have been given for twelve years already. These teachers are like the ineffective parents a psychiatrist-friend of mine has observed: They see that something doesn't work; then to make it work, they do more of the same. That's the kind of treatment too many developmental students are receiving, and as a result they continue their pattern of failure.

Now a word about how writing centers are fitting into this incongruous scene. The good news is that they do exist on many campuses. (Muriel Harris says that there are now over a thousand names on the Writing Lab Newsletter mailing list.) Unfortunately, though, many disheartening administrative decisions are being made in the name of labs or centers. An examination of at least two developmental-program proposals submitted to the Louisiana Board of Regents shows that so-called "learning centers" are a euphemistic label for libraries that include tapes and records in addition to books. Another institution wants its share of the extra state-appropriated dollars to help establish a "computer-vision" center as a cost-effective way to remediate developmental writers' problems. In some proposals labs are mentioned as "ideal" components to be implemented in the future if money over and above the current supplementary funds becomes available. Only rarely is articulation between writing centers and classrooms indicated.

Seven years ago when my department chairman appointed me to set up our writing lab, she looked ahead for me: "You'll have to work hard, but your day of recognition will come." We are gaining the acceptance and

recognition we have worked hard for. But with our new found wealth comes responsibility. Will we ignore that responsibility by refusing to address those who are making what we have found to be serious mistakes? Will we smugly ignore our own mistakes, refusing to explore the areas of our own ignorance? Will we ignore the insights that are a natural outgrowth of our practical work in writing centers? Or will we bear out the truism that "power corrupts," engaging in empire-building and creating discord among colleagues when they don't go along with our power plays?

These questions are my cautions. If we ignore them, critics of earlier days may soon be noting that the programs of which we are a part are failing to produce skilled writers. If we know why these programs are failing, we must take action, both for our own welfare and the health of our profession - not as an act of self-aggrandizement or because we believe we are the panacea, you understand, but because we have learned that we can be part of a much larger solution than we once envisioned.

Sally Sullivan
Univ. of N.C.

FROM THOUGHT TO WORD: LEARNING TO TRUST IMAGES

"The mistaken idea that thinking depends on the use of words dies hard."

F. R. H. Englefield

In the fall of 1980, I worked in our writing center with a student whose primary weakness in composition was one she shared with many of her freshman classmates--the proclivity to generalize. One generalization followed by another, unsupported by any concrete details, characterized Debby's writing. One reason that the majority of our students have this same problem is that the process of learning is a process of learning to generalize. As Michael Cole and Sylvia Scribner have found in their studies, the primary difference between the unschooled intellect and the schooled is that the former solves problems individually, while the latter solves them by application of a general rule.[1] The child in school, reading generalizations and being taught by generalizations, learns to trust them and to write them. It is no wonder then that when we get students after twelve years of schooling, we get writers who have almost no conception of the concrete, and who, furthermore, distrust it.

This distrust became evident to me years ago. After I gave my classes handouts of a former student's very general and abstract description of a place followed by a revised, more concrete and specific one, I invariably got the same response when I asked which was superior. Without exception, the majority of my students raised their hands in favor of the general/abstract version, and the reason they gave was that it "sounded better, it flowed." Evidently our task is twofold: not only do we have to teach our students to use concrete, specific language, but, furthermore, we must get them to trust it. What can we do to get student writers to trust in the concrete and, moreover, to <u>write</u> it?

A possible solution to the problem was suggested to me when I realized that often my own thought began with concrete images. That thought occurs without language has been verified by the experiments of a number of psychologists and linguists, from Köhler and Piaget to Vygotsky. Köhler's studies of chimps, Piaget's and Vygotsky's studies of the cognitive processes in children, and Furth's studies of thinking in deaf subjects have all established the fact that thinking occurs without language.[2] Of particular interest are the tests conducted by Piaget with deaf and blind subjects, the results of which revealed no difference between deaf and normal children, whereas blind subjects solved their problems four years later than normal.[3] It is at least worth noting that lack of language did not affect intellectual operation, while lack of sight did. One possible explanation is that the retarded intellectual operations of the blind were a result of their loss of sight, the sense that is our primary producer of images.

Besides these studies, I found support in Einstein's description of his experience putting thought into language. Calling the process "laborious," he explained that his thought began with "certain signs and more or less clear images," which, in a second stage after "associative play," he attempted to put into language.[4] Such a description, in addition to my own experience, suggested that one way we might get students to trust in the concrete and to use it in their writing, would be to get them to notice the concrete origins of their thought.

The most important part of Einstein's description is that putting his thought into words occurs only in a secondary stage, "when the associative play is sufficiently established" to be "reproduced at will." It may be that some of us never get to the second stage because the images escape. In addition,

putting some ideas into words may not always be a laborious process; the conventional symbols may just come. Still, this description, I think, throws some light on the reason some students fail to get their thought into words at all. For some the attempt to translate is premature; for others, the attempt to find a generalization to fit their thought is immediate, so that they do not pay attention to their images, let alone allow for "associative play." Such a student, for example, pictures Susan with her soft brown eyes, her chestnut hair streaked with blond, her lithesome body, and he writes: "Susan is a beautiful girl." He does this in part because of his trust in generalization and abstraction, in part because he quit paying attention to his images long ago. As a result, not only does he lose the images he had, but he loses the possibility of having more, translating before he allows the concrete outlines of his thought to produce others by association.

Certainly I found this true in working with Debby, who ignored her images, readily substituting generalizations. On her initial visit, she brought with her a very general ten-minute freewrite on music that she'd done in her class. Her effort, sprinkled with numerous misspellings as well as generalizations, recorded such statements as these: "Music can sooth the mind. . . . Music can tell a story of heartache or tell about good times. . . . Music can be sung in many different languages."[5] However, when I began questioning Debby, she told me that as she wrote, she had recalled a music class, during which her instructor had played jazz, and Debby had pictured a scene "like one in Gone With the Wind with Blacks on a porch, sitting around smiling and singing, clapping hands and feet." Instead of recording these associations and images, Debby had ignored them and gone on to the generalization that not all people like the same kind of music.

In order to get Debby to begin paying attention to the images she had when she thought, I made the following assignments, which she completed in approximately six weeks: first, she wrote about one feeling she'd had at the end of the day for the following two days, paying attention to any images produced as she recalled her feelings. Then, she listened to Janis Joplin's "Piece of My Heart" and wrote the images she had as she listened. Her third task was a revision of one of her papers describing her feeling "rushed," making it more concrete by putting in the images and details she'd given me verbally in conference when I'd questioned her about it. Her next assignment was to write down images provoked by the abstractions "angry," "happy," "hurt," and "frustrated." Her fifth assignment was to pay attention to images she had while reading abstractions, and the last was another ten-minute freewrite on music.

Debby's first two papers about her feeling rushed and pressured were largely abstract, although she did capture these feelings through her use of short sentences, fragments, and dashes: "Hurry! You'll be late--oh my--must catch my breath." When she revised one of them about her visit to the post office and search for a job, the result was a much more concrete piece of writing, containing such detail as the following: "One little man with greasy, brushed-back hair stood in front of me. He looked as if he would squeak when he talked." And then later, her description of a store manager she gave her application to began with this detail: "He sat back in his chair, bouncing a pencil off his chin."

Between these two efforts, Debby had listened to "Piece of my Heart," writing a paragraph beginning with these concrete statements: "A woman, lonely and desperate, sits alone. The room is darkening. The faint streaks of light through the tattered curtain show the dust particles floating about the room."

Certainly both this and her revision of a busy day indicated Debby's increased awareness of the images she had as she thought. So, too, did her response to the four abstractions that I called out to her one by one, asking her to write what immediately came to mind. The image she recorded prompted by "angry" was "a wave, making its way slowly toward the beach. The loud crash as it disperses into rushing water and foam." Her response to "hurt" began: "The twisted, mangled metal as it perched on the edge of the ditch." With this assignment, it was evident that Debby had truly begun to pay attention to the concrete outlines of her thought.

Because I wanted her to become aware that generalizations and abstractions can produce images, as well as the reverse, I asked her to record the images aroused by her reading during the next two weeks. Being unclear about how to do this, Debby returned to me and I read from Furth's Thinking Without Language, asking her to stop me whenever the text provoked an image. After I read a passage concerning how language and play both serve the child in thinking, she stopped me with the image of "an infant with a red rattle, waving it in his crib."

Debby's last assignment was another ten-minute freewrite on music, unannounced beforehand because I wanted to compare it to her first spontaneous effort. The difference between the two was remarkable. Not only was the second extremely concrete, but the misspellings found in the first had disappeared. Debby even spelled "rhythm" correctly in the latter, whereas she spelled it "rhthm" in her first effort. I had not looked for this particular result, but I was not surprised. Most good spellers write a great many words automatically, but for the more difficult ones, many I have talked to see an

image of the word in their minds and merely copy it out. At any rate, learning to pay attention to her images improved Debby's spelling as well as the concreteness of her writing. This last freewrite contained the following concrete images, among others: "Music is so relaxing--just to sit in an armchair, head back, eyes closed and mind just floating on the wind. . . . Some music can give the. . . wild feeling of speeding down a deserted highway with no one but yourself--the landscape zipping by with a smeared impression."

Besides more concreteness and better spelling, there were two other consequences of the experiment. At our last session, Debby told me that she had been recalling numerous images from her early childhood. These memories may have been prompted by her increased awareness of the images she had when she thought. It may be that the paucity of memories we have from very early childhood, before we acquired language, is the result of our lost ability to think pre-linguistically--in images. The last consequence was recorded by Debby in an evaluation of her experience that I asked her to write. She ended her evaluation with this observation: "Through the study of images, I have become aware of what is happening around me." As she explained when she gave me what she'd written: "I just seem to notice more." Because images appeal to the senses, by paying attention to her images, Debby came more alive through her senses, thus allowing her to gather more data for her image-making mechanisms.

There is still, however, a great deal of mystery surrounding how we think. I based my experiment with Debby on the supposition that we do have images when we think and, further, on the notion that the process of education has taught our children to generalize, to largely ignore any images they may have in an effort to translate them into generalities. Even though not all thought may begin with images, besides Einstein, there are plenty of psycholinguists and other

professionals who support the position that thinking can, and does sometimes at least, begin with images. As Vygotsky put it: "A thought may be compared to a cloud, shedding a shower of words."[6] The problem comes, of course, when the writer fails to notice the cloud.

My approach with Debby worked well, although it needs to be tried with a variety of students, in and out of class. Nevertheless, because of my success with her, I was encouraged to share the experience with other instructors who might use my method and get the same results. I hope they will.

NOTES

[1]Michael Cole and Sylvia Scribner, "Cognitive Consequences of Formal and Informal Education," Science, 182 (1973), 554.

[2]Köhler's studies are discussed in F. R. H. Englefield, Language: Its Relation to Thought, eds. G. A. Wells and D. R. Oppenheimer (London: Elek Books, 1977), pp. 4ff; J. Piaget, "Language and Thought," in Language In Thinking, ed. Parveen Adams (Baltimore: Penguin Books, 1972), pp. 170-79; L. S. Vygotsky, "Thought and Word," in Language in Thinking, ed. Parveen Adams (Baltimore: Penguin Books, 1972), pp. 180-213; H. G. Furth, Thinking Without Language (New York: MacMillan Co., 1966).

[3]H. Sinclair-de-Zwart, "Developmental Psycholinguistics," in Language in Thinking, pp. 266-76.

[4]In Barry F. Anderson, Cognitive Psychology (New York: Academic Press, 1975), pp. 191-92.

[5]Debby's responses are typed as they were written, without corrections in spelling or usage. Her complete responses are xeroxed in the appendix.

[6]"Thought," in Language in Thinking, p. 209.

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Willa Wolcott
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WRITING IN THE WRITING CENTER: PROVIDING PRACTICE AND INSTRUCTION

A central concern of the Writing Center at the University of Florida is to help students apply their editing skills to their own papers. All too often students tend to engage exclusively in the study of isolated components of grammar, spelling, or mechanics. They can spend weeks in the Center, completing workbook exercises or cassette programs, but unless forced to do so, they do not write. To increase the effectiveness of the students' work, the Center is stressing more writing practice and instruction.

Certainly, this emphasis on writing does not preclude grammar study, for many students do, in fact, need extensive work in specific areas, which the Writing Center with its diversity of materials is well suited to provide. Moreover, it is precisely for work in grammar that some students come to the Center, such as those upperclassmen required by their departments to pass the Test of Standard Written English, or those students preparing for the Law School Admission Test.

But the tendency for some students to work solely on grammar is due as well to other, more subtle factors. One such factor is the Center use of an objective diagnostic test which tends to funnel students more in the direction of studying fragments, commas, or verb endings than in pursuing larger writing issues. Another factor is the students themselves, for given a choice between working on grammar texts or actually

composing a paragraph or essay, most will opt for grammar work, which not only seems less threatening to them, but also, in their view, contains the key to the whole writing process. Still a third factor is the administrative streamlining which grammar study allows, for the Center is able to deal with many more students if they are working on areas that can be checked objectively than it is if students require assistance with thesis statements or development and organization.

Yet the Writing Center is ignoring its overall responsibility if students, during their work at the Center, are not made to apply their editing skills by doing some actual writing and then discussing it in a conference with their instructor. As studies have consistently shown, students do not always apply what they have learned about grammar and usage. For example, a major study done by Ellen Frogner in 1939 and another by Roland Harris in 1962 have shown little correlation between the study of grammar and improvement in writing; Lynn and Martin Bloom in their 1977 pilot study of the effect grammar study has on the writing of college students also concluded that a study of mechanics and grammar was only weakly related to writing improvement. Thus, grammar studied in isolation from writing experiences often remains just that--isolated.

This lack of application is particularly true in the case of basic writers; for instance, in 1979 Idstein and Carey found that grammar study has little effect on the writing of remedial-level college students. Dr. Sarah D'Eloia, editor of The Journal of Basic Writing, suggests why in her offprint The Uses and Limits of Grammar: 22

> Beyond the conceptual limitations of any given grammar, and the limitations imposed by the complexity of language itself, there is the fact that no grammar that is taught to Basic Writing students as it would be taught to upperclassmen or graduate students, that is, largely divorced from practice in perception, intensive writing and enforced proofreading, will have a significant effect on the writing of these students....For the chief limit of grammar is that grammatical analysis has no necessary connection to the synthetic process of writing. Perception is not production. Production is not proofreading....We minimize our effectiveness anytime we lose sight of this first principle. (p. 20)

My own experience with students in the Writing Center tends to corroborate Dr. D'Eloia's comments. One freshman who voluntarily enrolled in the Center studied a unit on sentence fragments, successfully completed a series of exercises in that area, and passed the required item test. However, when she was asked to write a short paper during her next work period in the Center, both she and I were dismayed to discover a number of fragments in her paper, an occurrence which clearly revealed that her lessons were not being applied.

This instance is fairly typical, I think, of what can happen if students using a Writing Center concentrate solely on the study of grammar or of a few isolated writing components. Admittedly, these skills are very important, but the transfer to writing does not occur readily without some concerted effort.

To help students make this transfer and, at the same time, to address the global issues of writing, the Center has incorporated writing both into its structured, one-credit

classes, for which students are given a grade, and into its non-credit, open-time program, in which they work independently under the supervision of a Center instructor. For example, during the summer session, in which certain entering freshmen are required to take the Writing Center class, the Center focuses on basic composition skills. Students receive directed instruction on focusing the main idea, using transitions, and practicing revision strategies. These writing lessons are followed by assignments for expository compositions on which students then are given an individual conference with the Center instructor.

During the subsequent term, when these same students are required to take a developmental writing course in addition to a second term of the Writing Center class, the Writing Center places more emphasis on sentence-level skills. The Center isolates certain common writing problems for group instruction and administers its own objective grammar test as the basis for planning an individualized program of study for each student. But the attempt to have students apply their grammar skills to their own writing continues in several ways. For instance, students must still write short papers for their Writing Center classes, papers which they are asked to proofread specifically for the areas they have studied both independently and as a class. Their subsequent conferences with the Center instructor focus on these areas. In addition, the inclusion of sentence combining in the second term of the Center classes gives students practice in applying lessons in punctuation or parallelism, as well as in addressing larger

writing issues through the consideration of focus, emphasis, or development.

Finally, the Center attempts to maintain a close working relationship with the instructors of the developmental writing course. As one part of this process, the Center provides the developmental instructors with copies of each student's individualized program of study so that the instructors can suggest changes based on errors made in actual student writing. In addition, the curriculum for the developmental writing course has been specifically designed by the other Writing Center coordinator, Laura Berns, to synchronize in several respects with that of the Writing Center course. Not only do the developmental instructors use sequential checklists to make students proofread their papers for the individual areas they have studied at the Center, but the developmental classes also revise passages which emphasize the areas students have worked on collectively in the Writing Center. In some instances even the developmental composition assignments follow areas studied at the Writing Center. For example, after students have worked on the mechanics of quoting at the Writing Center, they are asked in their developmental classes to write a paper which uses quoted material. Of course, this goal of coordinating the Writing Center classes with the developmental writing course is not always achieved. Nevertheless, an attempt is being made in both courses to have students apply their grammar skills to their own writing.

This effort to implement students' work on individual grammar or writing skills with actual writing practice has

been more feasible with the Center classes than with the non-credit program. By its very nature, the non-credit or open-time program is less structured, since students either choose voluntarily to enroll in the Center or are referred there for help by a classroom instructor. Because they receive neither credit nor grades, the opportunity, as well as the motivation, for students actually to practice their writing becomes more artificial and limited.

To fill this gap, the Center again uses conferences on papers--either papers from other classes or those done in the Writing Center--as a central core of its writing instruction. For example, the referral students can, if their classroom instructor consents, confer with the Center staff on a few aspects of their classroom papers, preferably those areas on which they have been working in the Center. This form of writing instruction, which is typical of that found in many other centers, has the advantage not only of addressing the immediate needs of the students but also of indicating the extent to which students' work in the Center is carrying over to their writing in other classes. Of course, there are some disadvantages as well, in that the Center instructors are frequently put in the position of second-guessing the classroom instructor or of straddling that "fine line" between assisting the student without doing any of the actual writing. But the benefits outweigh the problems, for with the use of an inductive approach through which instructors ask students <u>why</u> the organization is weak, <u>how</u> a given sentence can be improved, or <u>what</u> is wrong with the comma-use in a particular instance,

they can actively engage students in the writing/revision process and make them apply their editing skills to their own work.

To provide this same kind of instruction for the voluntary participants of the non-credit program, the Center encourages students to write in-class expository papers on which they also receive a conference. The Center attempts to ensure some consistency in this procedure by assigning a specific instructor to monitor the progress of each open-time student. The student can use the Center at any time, of course, but for part of one period each week, the student meets with the same instructor to discuss his or her progress.

Thus, both in its classes and in its non-credit program, the Center is encouraging its students to write and then learn from their writing through conferences with the Center instructors. Since these conferences, though short, are time-consuming--as is always the case whenever writing is involved--this practice requires that the Center be well staffed at all times. The Center employs several graduate teaching assistants to teach three classes a week and to cover a set number of open-time hours. Their teaching load is made manageable by a number of factors: Not only are the classes small, consisting of 10-12 students, but the curriculum is also highly structured, and any necessary instructional tests or materials are provided by the two coordinators, thereby keeping to a minimum the amount of preparation time needed. Furthermore, to make the open-time staffing more efficient, the Center

employs two student assistants as well, who distribute materials, maintain student records, and score objective tests.

Although the staffing needed is extensive, the Center continues to emphasize the importance of having its students do actual writing. Because such writing can reveal problems not indicated on objective tests, through this means the Center is better able to address the diverse needs of its population, which includes many basic writers, students for whom English is a foreign language, and even some graduate students embarking upon their theses or dissertations. Furthermore, through doing actual writing students are forced to synthesize the various elements of the writing process and come to terms with such larger issues as organization, unity, or development. Finally, through doing actual writing students are made to apply what they have learned about verb endings, sentence structure, or controlling ideas.

Thus, while grammar study provides a necessary foundation, writing must also have an essential place in the Writing Center, for only to the extent that students actually learn to <u>apply</u> their editing skills to their own papers will the Writing Center fulfill its purpose of improving student writing.

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Building Cognitive Skills in Basic Writers

Confronting a class of first year Harvard law students, Professor Kingsfield pronounces that while the students may study the nuts and bolts of law, "I train your minds." Though less intimidating than Kingsfield, teachers of basic writing are no less involved in training minds. Yet, obvious as it is that writing and thinking are intimately related, the teaching of writing has remained, at least publicly, uncommitted to the teaching of thinking, despite the fact that thinking is the most basic of basic skills needed by basic writers.

Probably one reason for the disjunction of teaching thinking with writing, aside from the overwhelming hubris of such a position, is the difficulty of translating a theory of cognition into a viable pedagogy. Another reason is a rhetorical tradition that emphasizes the forms and structures of written communications to the exclusion of the thought processes that engender these patterns. However, several important works in the theory of composition stress the cognitive underpinnings of writing and its development. Needed now is a sound and workable paradigm that defines the various thinking processes and shows their relationships -- in short, a cognitive hierarchy. One such hierarchy is suggested by Bloom's Taxonomy of Educational Objectives -- a model that brings three decades of educational research to bear upon the cognitive issues now being mapped out in the field of composition.

The notion that thinking skills develop sequentially and hierarchically gained currency with James Britton's The Development of Writing Abilities. Asserting that his "central concern was with the development of writing in relation to the development of thinking," Britton legitimized cognition as an appropriate, indeed necessary, component of writing instruction.[1] This alliance is particularly essential in view of Britton's findings that high school students, at least in Great Britain, have relatively few opportunities to engage in those forms of writing, especially of a speculative sort, which require the highest levels of thinking. By identifying the cognitive basis of writing, Britton made possible a truly developmental approach to teaching writing. Traditional patterns, the structural -- word, sentence, paragraph, theme -- and the rhetorical -- description, narration, classification, analysis, persuasion -- are neither hierarchical nor developmental. Britton's sequence of functions, from expressive through transactional to poetic parallels his developmental model of abstract thinking: the record, the report, the generalized narrative; then analogic, speculative, and tautological thinking. These sequences seem to reflect the natural evolution of thinking in the maturing person and the expression of thoughts in language.

Britton's sequence is one of many models of cognitive development; it owes much to the work of Jean Piaget, the Swiss psychologist who seems to have established indisputably the fact of progressive stages in mental development. Piaget's stages of thinking -- pre-operational, concrete operations, and formal operations -- are being applied to disciplines ranging from physics to history to writing, a phenomenon that suggests

the need for increased attention to cognition across the curriculum. Andrea Lunsford's research on egocentrism in basic writers shows that such students are still at Piaget's stage of concrete operations.[2] Using another application of Piaget's theory, Ralph Freisinger in a 1980 College English article marshalled impressive evidence to show that in many areas of their school work, college students have not reached the stage of formal operations -- a stage in which thought is characterized by abstract, de-centered thinking and an increased reliance on language as the intermediary between the self and the environment.[3] Similarly, over a decade of research into the development of historical thinking suggests that in language oriented disciplines, formal operational thinking does not begin until ages 16-18, four to six years later than formal operations in science and mathematics.[4] It is probably safe to assume that our 18-20 year old basic writers have yet to make this transition.

Yet another hint that writing instruction must concern itself with sequential cognitive development comes from James Moffett's Teaching the Universe of Discourse. Moffett proposes a four-tiered hierarchy of abstraction -- recording, reporting, generalizing, theorizing -- in which concrete, egocentric thought and expressions undergo a sorting and selecting operation, join with other experiences through the processes of inference-making and generalizing, and eventually become material for organizing predictions about the world. In theory, all these sequences get to the heart of the matter -- that in learning to write, students must simultaneously build their cognitive powers with their linguistic

powers. This view of composing provides powerful insights into why students write and think as they do, clarifying both the general nature of the composing process and specific shortcomings in student's approaches to it. In practice, however, none of these sequences suggests an operational model for curriculum building. Piaget, Moffett, Britton, and others have explained the problem, but understanding the problem does not necessarily imply a solution.

Implicit in each of these hierarchies is an effort to relate thinking to the act of composing -- the enormously complex issue of how one acquires ideas, puts them into words, perceives and presents the relationship of one idea to another, and ponders the rhetorical problems of presenting ideas to a reader. In this sense, writing is a mental juggling act of cognitive, rhetorical, and syntactic variables. Like the apprentice juggler, one learns to write by starting with the fewest possible elements and gradually adding more. The more that enter the act, the more one's ability to juggle each one is taxed. The purpose of a cognitive hierarchy, then, is to control at least one of the variables juggled in writing, so that all can develop harmoniously. The alternative is to begin with too many and drop everything, as all of us have discovered when problems solved in previous assignments reappear later on. Richard Lloyd-Jones put it this way: "As one's intellectual reach is extended, one's once-adequate writing is no longer sufficient. . . . To some extent, confusing prose is a sign of active engagement with new ideas as opposed to routine regurgitation through the pen of what is stuffed

into the ear."[6] Therefore, by systematically building writers' cognitive skills, one reduces the burden of related variables such as organization, rhetoric, grammar, diction, and so on.

Although thinking is still an amorphous concept, one model that attempts to define it through cumulative levels of performance is widely used among educators and has been extensively researched and tested. Bloom's Taxonomy of Educational Objectives orginated in 1948 as an effort on the part of the American Psychological Association to clarify vague educational goals like "really understand" or "internalize."[7] As a classification of the goals of an educational system, the taxonomy provides a cumulative hierarchy, from simple to complex, of the cognitive abilities educators in all disciplines, at all levels of instruction, wish to develop in their students. Originally intended as a tool for improving testing, the taxonomy remains one of the most exhaustive catalogues of what people do when they think. As such, it has been used not only to regulate and standardize testing, but, as Bloom had hoped, to "stimulate thought about educational problems" and to "aid /research workers/ in formulating hypotheses about the learning process and changes in students" (p. 21). In these areas, the taxonomy has been used to develop and assess curricula from elementary education to graduate programs in medicine and in subject areas as diverse as mathematics and social studies.[8] More recently, it has also served as a gauge of teachers' effectiveness in promoting cognitive growth through the daily interpersonal exchanges between teacher and student.[9] In all these

applications, the taxonomy has been tested for internal validity, accuracy, and comprehensiveness. Despite minor variations in findings, research has consistently maintained the cumulative and hierarchical nature of the cognitive processes the taxonomy describes.[10]

Bloom's taxonomy has a potential bearing on writing instruction because of the concreteness of its six major objectives. From least to most complex, learning proceeds through these levels: Knowledge, Comprehension, Application, Analysis, Synthesis, and Evaluation. At each new level, thought processes build on the previous levels. Implicit in this structure is the assumption of an ascending scale of difficulty, so that tasks at the comprehension level are more difficult than those at the knowledge level, and so on.

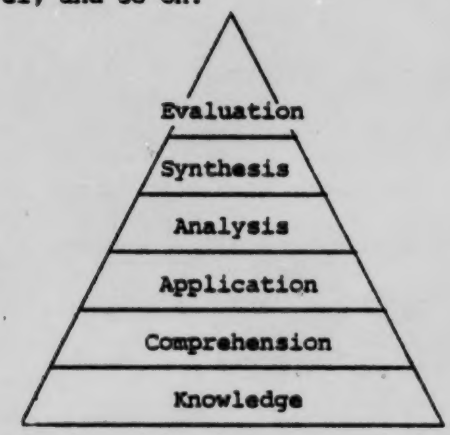

Fig. 1 Taxonomy of Cognitive Skills

If this assumption is as true of writing as it is in other areas of learning, writing assignments requiring synthesis or evaluation make the greatest cognitive demands, while those at the knowledge or comprehension level, or what Moffett called recording and reporting, make the

least demands. With cognitive demands minimized, problems with diction sentence construction, selection of details, and organization correspondingly diminish. By its very nature, writing is a synthetic process, one of the most taxing cognitive operations. However, by logically sequencing writing assignments according to the taxonomy, teachers can incrementally develop the kinds of thinking processes that students must engage in as they write. In the case of basic writers, for whom the complexities of both written language and academic demands are so overwhelming, such a sequence helps to ensure gradual and growing mastery of these inter-related skills. A review of Bloom's definitions for each taxonomic level shows what a cognitively-based curriculum might look like.

Knowledge, the foundation of thinking, is the accumulation of pieces of information. As Bloom points out, "the knowledge category differs from the others in that remembering is the major psychological process involved here, while in the other categories the remembering is only one part of a much more complex process of relating, judging, and reorganizing" (p. 62). At this level the student is in a relatively passive role, simply remembering material as it has been given. Bloom lists at some length the various forms of remembered knowledge, establishing an internal hierarchy that ranges from recall of specific facts and terminology to recall of universals and abstractions in a field. However, more important than the knowledge categories themselves is the assertion that memory skills, too, require sequential development.

Research on testing practices in high schools shows why work at the knowledge level is especially appropriate to basic writing instruction. A 1963 study of 4,562 test items from 74 final exams in social studies at 63 California high schools revealed that 98 percent of the questions fell into the knowledge category, with 75 percent of those questions asking about "knowledge of specific facts."[11] In a larger study, another researcher found that of 60,000 study and test questions in high school history books and teacher's manuals, over 90 percent were given at the knowledge and comprehension level.[12] These studies show rather clearly that entering college students not only have had limited experience doing the independent, self-initiated thinking required to write well, but that most of their thinking skills have been directed toward the very lowest levels of recollection. In fact, as researchers in the most recent study of Bloom's taxonomy report, "teachers should recognize that questioning at the lower taxonomic levels is not only associated with lower levels of achievement but probably also discourages thinking at the higher taxonomic levels."[13]

This being the case, writing assignments for basic writers need to start where the students are -- with the direct embodiment of remembered material into written language. Short pieces might involve the simple recording of facts such as the plot of a favorite TV show and move on to longer written reports of more complex arrangements of information such as a research study in a psychology class or a biological process like the Kreb's cycle. By writing down what they already know well,

basic writers can suspend the anxiety that is associated with more difficult writing tasks.

At the comprehension level, students begin to internalize information, according to Bloom through the processes of translation, paraphrase, interpretation, and extrapolation. Thinking is still closely bound to the source, but the student steps beyond rote memorization to put concepts into familiar terms, to begin perceiving distinctions between generalizations and specifics, and to be able to fill in gaps in the material, much as readers do in Cloze tests.

Most essay test questions probably rely on comprehension, but in the writing class other variations are possible. Paraphrasing, especially of unfamiliar or even disagreeable sources, requires students to overcome their egocentrism and see the source as it is, not as they wish or believe it to be. Similarly, letters, especially those reporting information to a reader, help to build comprehension skills; so do problem solving exercises in which the data is given, process explanations, explications of readings and simple summaries (not those involving interpretation or judgment) and, at the most sophisticated point of the comprehension hierarchy, classification of elements of a given system. This activity helps to initiate later developments in the disciplined use of coordination and subordination, not just as syntactic patterns, but as thinking abilities. In all these exercises, writers evidence their comprehension by going beyond egocentric needs to render material in a suitable form for a reader. As Bloom discovered while he was preparing the taxonomy, "in the cognitive domain especially, it appears that as

the behaviors become more complex, the individual is more aware of their existence" (p. 19); and "students are able to give more complete reports of their attack on a problem as the problem becomes more complex" (p. 20).[14]

Comprehension involves thinking that derives from a given context. At the next level, application, students put knowledge to work in new situations, using what Bloom calls "transfer learning." What happens here is a sorting through of what the individual knows and a re-structuring to make it applicable to a particular problem. Students extend the ability to classify by organizing information according to abstract principles that connect the features of their knowledge with those of the problem. As such, application is not only an end in itself, but a prelude to greater skill in handling generalizations and organizing material rather than perceiving the acquisition of knowledge as a final goal.

In review of studies on high school curricula, the step from comprehension to application may not be as automatic as it seems. Assignments at this level might encompass the beginnings of thesis-writing, the marshalling of a generalization about what is known and its application to a new situation. The general form of such assignments would be, "Given this, what would happen if . . ." with topic content ranging from the application of laws to cases, sociological or political principles to current events, laws of geometry to carpentry or trigonometry to pool. In each instance, students move from the here-and-now of the rule or abstraction to the realm of predictions about possible outcomes, thus progressively broadening their perspectives.

Analysis succeeds application in the cognitive hierarchy. Able now to devote their attention to the internal logic of material, students need to develop abilities, says Bloom, in analysing elements, implicit and explicit, relationships, and principles. In its simpler forms, analysis is very much appropriate to the cognitive achievements necessary for basic writers. As writing assignments become more complex, students need to be aware of how to organize logically and coherently. At this level, structure and logic are not self-evident from the subject matter; they must be inferred. Distinctions between fact and assumption, conclusions and support, relevant and irrelevant detail, dominant and subordinate ideas are all concerned with the larger question of how meaning is conveyed. Given a basic writing program of sufficient scope, analytical abilities could be best developed through coordination of critical reading and writing instruction to provide expository models for anaylsis and imitation. Even in a more limited program, however, analysis of TV and magazine advertisements or of books and films, explanations of political or interpersonal situations or of causes or effects can begin to build competence at this cognitive level.

Like analysis, complete and systematic development of skills in synthesis may be beyond the scope of a basic writing program. Yet Bloom insists throughout the taxonomy that uses of the heirarchy may range from the foundation of an entire curriculum to the structure of a particular unit, and from any grade level, first through graduate school. Moreover, in practice, the definitions of cognitive activities

are relative to a particular context; what constitutes analysis in one situation may simply be knowledge at another. Consequently, work in a basic writing program may very well move toward guided assignments in synthesis, providing a transition to the more open-ended requirements common in freshman English.

Bloom defines synthesis as "the putting together of elements and parts so as to form a whole, . . . to constitute a pattern or structure not clearly there before" (p. 162). As the first of three sub-categories under synthesis, Bloom lists "production of a unique communication," affirming the status of writing as a synthetic activity. Genuine research papers (not the familiar encyclopedia papers) represent the most taxing form of written synthesis; however, at the basic writing level, research projects involving the definition, collection, and organization of data, and the interpretation of that data expressed in a thesis statement exercise all the components of synthesis. Although simpler than the traditional library paper, such projects, culminating as they do in all the processes of theorizing, represent the cumulative nature of the cognitive hierarchy.

In practice, Bloom recognizes synthesis as the most complex of the cognitive skills. Evaluation, appearing last in the hierarchy, stands as an ideal rather than a real achievement. Bloom qualifies its placement this way:

> Although evaluation is placed last in the cognitive domain, because it is regarded as requiring to some extent all the other categories of behavior, it is not necessarily the last step in thinking or problem solving.

> It is quite possible that the evaluative process will in some cases be the prelude to the acquisition of new knowledge, a new attempt at comprehension or application, or a new analysis and synthesis." (185)

In an ideal sense, evaluation occurs when individuals employ both internal evidence (consistency and coherence) and external evidence (consideration of standards, ethics, aesthetic principles) as the basis for judgments about value or worth. In this respect, argument and persuasion constitute genuine evaluation, and from Bloom's perspective they are appropriately considered the most complex of expository forms. But Bloom's uneasiness over the actual uses of evaluation is substantiated by Kunen, Cohen, and Soleman's 1981 study of the taxonomy, the most complete and reliable study to date. These researchers conclude, "since Evaluation activities are more concerned with considering the value, worth, or appropriateness of given information than with the construction of new information, as is the goal in Synthetic tasks, . . . the Evaluation category does not represent the cumulative contributions of all the preceding levels and is inappropriately placed at the top of the hierarchy."[15]

I raise these issues here because they lead to some intriguing questions with which to close. Experience with basic writers in particular, and immature students in general, indicates that they are all too ready to evaluate, perhaps because evaluation seems to free them from the more taxing -- or less familiar -- application of the other cognitive processes. Such students confuse understanding with evaluation, conclusion with assertion, shutting off further inquiry.

As a result we see thesis statements broad enough for a multi-volume encyclopedia or vague enough to keep an entire philosophy department busy for a year. Premature teaching of thesis statements may in itself reinforce the tendency to make premature evaluations. As my analysis of the taxonomy has shown, not until the third level of the heirarchy, application, are students cognitively ready to formulate thesis statements, and not until they have begun to master analytic tasks are students likely to have acquired the detached objectivity necessary for mature writing.

Bloom's taxonomy, and the research it has engendered, make a convincing case for the needs of basic writers, not solely the grammatical needs fashionable among "back to basics" enthusiasts, but the cognitive needs for thinking skills that have perhaps never been even marginally cultivated. With an instrument such as the taxonomy, teachers of basic writing might begin to grapple with problems of diagnosis that have eluded us for so long. More important, the taxonomy provides a logical foundation for a cognition-based curriculum in basic writing -- a curriculum that may reach to the underlying causes of basic writers' problems with language, and not to the symptoms alone.

Notes

1 James Britton, The Development of Writing Abilities, 11 - 18 (London: Macmillan, 1978), p. 6.

2 Andrea Lunsford, "The Content of Basic Writers' Essays," College Composition and Communication, 31 (October, 1980), p. 284.

3 Ralph Freisinger, "Cross Disciplinary Writing Workshops: Theory and Practice," College English, 42 (October, 1980), pp. 154-66.

4 Michael A. Zaccaria, "The Development of Historical Thinking: Implications for the Teaching of History," The History Teacher, 11 (May, 1978), pp. 325-26.

5 James Moffett, Teaching the Universe of Discourse (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1968), p. 35.

6 Richard Lloyd-Jones, "The Politics of Research into the Teaching of Composition," College Composition and Communication, 28 (October, 1977), p. 220.

7 Benjamin S. Bloom, Taxonomy of Educational Objectives, Handbook I: Cognitive Domain (New York: Longman, Green & Co., 1956).

[8] For examples of applications of Bloom;s Taxonomy, note the following: Jeremy Kilpatrick, "Cognitive Theory and the SMSG Program," Journal of Research in Science Teaching, 0(1964), pp. 247-51, (mathematics curriculum, K-12); Christine McGuire, "The Process Approach to Evaluation of Medical Curricula: Theory and Practice," presented at the Conference on Medical Education, South African College of Physicians, July, 1964, cited in Richard C. Cox and Nancy Unks, A Selected and Annotated Bibliography of Studies Concerning the Taxonomy of Educational Objectives: Cognitive Domain, June, 1967, ERIC #ED013655; Danial Kegan "Using Bloom's Taxonomy for Curriculum Planning and Evaluation in Non-traditional Educational Settings," Journal of Higher Education, 48 (January, 1977), pp. 66-73.

[9] David Aspy, Toward A Technology for Humanizing Education (Champaign, Illinois: Research Press, 1972), Chapter 3, "Cognitive Processes."

[10] Seth Kunen, et. al., "A Levels of Processing Analysis of Bloom's Taxonomy," Journal of Educational Psychology, 73 (April, 1981), pp. 202-211.

[11] Gordon D. Lawrence, "Analysis of Teacher-Made Tests in Social Studies According to the Taxonomy of Educational Objectives," 1963, on file at the Hannold Library of the Claremont Colleges, Claremont, California, cited in Cox and Unks.

[12] D. Trachtenberg, "Student Tasks in Text Materials: What Cognitive Skills Do they Tap?," Peabody Journal of Education, 52 (1974), pp. 54-57.

[13] Kunen, et. al., p. 210.

[14] See also Benjamin S. Bloom and Lois Broder, "Problem-Solving Processes of College Students" Supplementary Educational Monograph (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1950).

[15] Kunen, et. al., p. 208.

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Priorities and Goals for the Performance-Based Basic Writer

There have been few, if any, attempts to adequately describe the varieties of writing with which a basic writing teacher is confronted. Instructional strategies offered for basic writers in the professional literature tend to emphasize errors and only rarely take into account the variety of composing strategies that basic writers may bring with them to the classroom. The prescriptive needs of the basic writer are, therefore, summarily developed and categorized according to the student's abilities to deal with only grammatical considerations even though stylistic conventions are only a part of the composing process for basic writers--indeed for all writers.

While composing, the basic writer must consider the demands of his assignment and his audience even as he must cope with the constraints of the writing situation, which include both grammatical and stylistic conventions.[1] The degree to which the basic writer can achieve success will eventually be determined by his ability to direct his composing process toward the demands of the total rhetorical situation rather than just demands of stylistic convention. Therefore, the prescriptive needs of the basic writer should be developed not only with regard to his errors, but also specifically in terms of his response to the rhetorical situation. Continued instructional emphasis on low-level grammatical skills can serve only to distort the meaning of the writing process for basic writers who have established grammatical performance as a priority goal for their writing. Indeed, for these writers performance-centered instruction can reinforce misconceptions about the ultimate goals and

value of writing. As Linda Flower and John R. Hayes have shown, a writer's goals, purposes, and intentions guide his composing process.[2] When basic writing teachers choose to ignore this, they classify their students as something less than writers. This paper attempts to address this issue with a comparison of two types of basic writing students.

The following selection exemplifies the writing of one of my first semester basic writers. It was written in response to an assignment which asked that the student explain how an experience changed her life and also changed her perspective.

Writing Sample # 1

> When high school was almost over. I was still working on the same job in a day care center. Not knowing that some day I was going in the world of adult.
>
> My mother would alway ask me. What are you going to do after high school. I would alway say I still have my job at the nursery or maybe I will go to college. There was alway a maybe. Time got close and it go to my mine that I really didn't want to work there. I needed more education more experiment in life.
>
> One day She asks me again and I told her I was positive about going to college. I found out their was more in the mine instead of working on a jobe not knowing what was in my furture.

This writer's response is characteristic of one type of basic writer who fails to develop a strategy for meeting an assigned task. In response to the assignment, the writer simply recorded the concrete observations of an experience in the order the thoughts came to her mind, and in so doing, she failed to establish any clear relationship between the writing assignment and the narrative form she used to respond to the assignment. She never defined for the reader why the ex-

perience had meaning for her because she never clearly identified the meaning for herself. James Britton et al. describe as "expressive" an early stage of utterance which might characterize this piece of writing and others like it. Britton identifies an expressive response ". . . as an utterance that 'stays close to the speaker' and shares his context."[3] He sees the expressive as a beginning stage from which mature forms of writing develop. The writer of this passage has not advanced beyond this beginning stage in her writing development.

This piece of writing also reveals a more important strategy that perhaps explains the writer's failure to bring an understanding of the importance of this experience for her to the page. Here, the writer seems more concerned with establishing the relationships within the syntactic patterns of each sentence than with forming conceptual relationships. She attends to coordinating and subordinating sentence patterns which are beyond her ability while ignoring the constraints imposed by the assignment. She is, it appears, more interested in imitating adult academic discourse than attending to the communicative demands of the assignment.

During the semester this student responded willingly to instruction which emphasized simple, compound, and complex sentence generation, and she consciously attempted to redirect her concrete, narrative responses toward responses which demonstrated the relationships between her experiences and the meaning she brought to those experiences. Her writing, however, indicated she merely shifted from one kind of error to another. The following paragraph was written by the same student approximately two months later in the semester. The assignment asked

that the student identify the advantages of "being yourself."

Writing Sample # 2

> Trying to be somebody else; that you're not is something that you can not do. People seldon think that different personality is a way out of their own life. Using make-up to distinguish their own facial expression toward themself. Showing lack of interest in there own attuite without knowing that they are somebody. Trying and doing new things is something wonderful, but trying to be somebody that your not is different. Loving yourself for who you are, what you are and just being you is so special. Deep in your heart. there is the real you. There is not better way in life than to be yourself.

In this later piece, the student responded to grammatical instruction by selecting a syntactic pattern (participial phrases) that is even more complex than the earlier pattern and one which she is even less able to handle. The assignment added a perplexing burden to the writing process for her because she was unable to devise a way of developing and organizing information in her writing. The abstract nature of the assignment simply focused her attention toward syntactic patterns since the student found it difficult to sequence her ideas so that they formed a unified, connected statement in the same way she was able to sequence narrative detail in writing sample # 1.

When the student repeated the course during the spring semester, she specifically asked to rewrite the assignment on "being yourself." The following paragraph was her second response to that assignment.

Writing Sample # 3

> People who are unhappy with their lives often try to change their personalities. The way they look, they don't have any friends, but most of all it comes by being yourself. People who try to change the way

> they look often use cometics, buying new clothes and doing things that is not themselve. Thinking that people will like you. The best way to be happy is to be yourself. By doing things that you like to do. Explore our society by your own viewpoint. Test things out for yourself see how it operate. Things that you like to do is what counts. There is not better way in life than to be yourself.

This piece of writing suggests that the student made a conscious effort to modify her syntactic structure. But once again she devoted her efforts almost exclusively to forming syntactic patterns. She was unable to connect the ideas within her paper, and her goal for writing continued to be exclusively modification of sentence structure.

The writer described above demonstrated characteristics in her writing which were typical of a group of writers who relied heavily upon cliches and other types of formulary expressions which characterize, according to Walter Ong, forms of oral communication. This group characteristically comes from what Ong has termed residually oral cultures where oral thought and expression patterns continue to dominate despite development of elementary writing and reading skills.[4] Although these basic writers find their language to be functional and sufficient for their needs, their oral response patterns do not equip them to deal with the cognitive demands of the composing process.

This group of basic writers prefers global approaches to learning and have great difficulty analyzing elements within a unit of thought. Beginning writers from this group often search for what Ong calls "non-analytic shortcuts into the depths of human issues."[5] These students characteristically make generalized judgments on the basis of broad categories and they are rarely moved to search for the specifics under-

lying their opinions.

The limitations of this type of student can be better understood when compared with other basic writers in the same classroom. Consider the following paper written by another basic writer with a different type of problem. The assignment was written in response to the change-of-perspective assignment mentioned above, and, like writing sample # 1, it was written at the beginning of the semester.

Writing Sample # 4

> I was force to change and the change help me to grow. The change will always play a big part in my life. It help me see all the different ways of life. The change hit me and I had no say in it.
>
> I happen when I moved from Trenton to Hamilton. Trenton is a big city with most black people. I was part of the city life. I through there wasn't any thing better than being in the city. Then the biggest move of my life happen, that's when I moved to Hamilton Township. It was a big different from fast city to the slow township life. Coming from the city all light skin people were just white. But making the move I find out there was a big different. That they were different too even though they all was white. I had to change to way they lived. It first it seem like there was nothing to do. Well thing I was used to doing. It first I tough people just don't come out. Than when school started it bugged my out. I had never been in a class room with white people, to make it even bad, I was the only black kid in that class. Right there that when I had to change. It was like getting tough how to walk again. But I will remember that I think that made me in to a hole person because I have been on both side of the stick. I know how to live in both style.

The writer of this piece was able to form a relationship between a particular experience and a point of view that he currently holds. He writes, "It was like getting tough how to walk again. But I will remember that I think that made me in to a hole person because I have been on both side of the stick." Here the writer was able to see an

analogy between different developmental stages in his life and a particular experience. He has advanced beyond concrete narration to analysis of experience. It is such analysis that forms the critical step toward the development of writing skills. Janet Emig comments on the important role of analysis and synthesis in the writing process when she says:

> Writing . . . connects the three major tenses of our experience to make meaning. And the two major modes by which these three aspects are united are the processes of analysis and synthesis: analysis, the breaking of entities into their constituent parts; and synthesis, combining or fusing these, often into fresh arrangements or amalgams.[6]

The strategies employed by the second student demonstrate these principles.

The two writers described above are students with quite different purposes and goals for writing, and therefore they are students with quite different problems. The first writer appears to be consciously attending to strategies consistent with what Carl Bereiter has termed a performance stage of writing development. In the performance stage the writer focuses his attention on integrating associative forms of discourse, which are really no more than thoughts presented on the page, with the conventions of the language.[7] The performance stage of writing has been the traditional goal of all writing instruction, and the first writer seems to have internalized the emphasis of this traditional approach.

The writing of this student, and the writing of others like her, reflect deficiencies which seem to be consistent with her performance goals. As a writer she has not found a way of coming to terms with the constraints imposed by an assignment. She seems to have nothing

to say beyond the limits of her immediate experience, and the necessary organizational means are not available to her to help her discover patterned ways of abstracting experience. Secondly, she is unable to adjust her writing to constraints imposed by her audience. She is so absorbed with the "sounds" of conventional academic discourse that communicating with a reader is at best a low-priority goal. Finally, her preoccupation with convention indicates she has no other purpose for writing than to satisfy classroom requirements. Her goals for writing are extrinsic and her motivation depends on the reinforcement of a grade.

By comparison, the second writer focuses his attention on communicating the meaning he can bring to the page, a task consistent with what Bereiter has termed the communicative stage of writing. According to Bereiter, communicative discourse is writing ". . . which is calculated to have a desired effect on an audience."[8] The second writer demonstrates that he is aware not only of the constraints of the assignment, but also that he has a way of organizing his experiences into some form of conceptual representation. He has not fully mastered the skills that are necessary to communicate effectively with a reader, but he has focused his attention toward the goal of cummunicating.

These writing samples suggest that all basic writers are not the same in the sense that they have different goals and purposes for writing and, therefore, bring different perspectives to the page as they begin to write. It follows that instructional strategies should be devised to restructure the writer's purposes and goals which are inconsistent with constructive writing behavior.

The problems of the performance-based basic writer are complex and, realistically, may not be solved within the framework of one or two semesters of instruction. The cognitive learning styles, oral cultural patterns, and years of traditional remedial instruction have apparently come together in these writers to create responses which are highly resistant to change. The performance-based basic writer described above, and others like her, are unlikely to experience growth in their writing development until they are able to abandon their preoccupation with stylistic conventions and replace performance goals with communicative goals. For these basic writers traditional basic writing instruction focused on error-avoidance, particularly exercises which demand simple rule-governed writing skills, are counter-productive and may serve only to reinforce performance writing processes which are inconsistent with the basic writer's development.

These writers first of all need an awareness of the function of language as a way of knowing. This awareness will not be made available to them strictly through writing. Extensive reading instruction may be necessary to provide the foundation for their experiences with words in order that these students can first comprehend how other writers have chosen to use their language in defining experience before they as writers begin to do the same. Their writing should initially be in response to carefully sequenced reading assignments. These students should be asked to define, analyze, and evaluate what they have read. They should also have a number of opportunities to share

their written responses with others in the classroom to reinforce the concept that writing is a communicative process. Reading used in connection with writing may be a way for basic writers to come to understand that meaning, as Shaughnessy argues, "resides not in the page nor in the reader but in the encounter between the two."[9]

The performance-based basic writer's misconceptions about what a writer does and does not do when he writes is another fundamental problem that must be addressed through instructional strategies. Basic writers believe that meaning is somehow miraculously received and perhaps only special people are able to receive the gift. They need to understand that all good writing is "born of error." As David Bartholmae argues,

> Papers aren't delivered whole in a flash of insight only to be transcribed in tranquility. We should tell this to our students. Their problem . . . is not so much that they don't know 'how to write' but they don't know about writing.[10]

Part of learning about writing is learning to cope with errors rather than struggle against them. The writing teacher can teach his students to cope with error by emphasizing the revision process rather than emphasizing error-avoidance exercises. Students should be asked to search for sentence boundaries in typed copies of their writing which appear less tentative and more formalized than their own handwritten pieces. They should also be asked to read aloud their writing to the teacher, a fellow student, or a tutor in order that these students can begin to recognize the relationship between their knowledge

of the spoken word and the written word as well as the relationship between their own writing and the audience they intend to address.

Finally while it is important that basic writers learn to sustain their writing, it is equally important that they come to see that writing must have direction and convey meaning, that generalizations must be supported, explained, and developed, and that the knowledge of the reader cannot be taken for granted. As Bartholmae has argued, spontaneous, undirected journal and free-writing assignments do not provide the performance-based writer with the necessary "restriction of a rhetorical context."[11] Unstructured journal and free-writing assignments may only provide the student with opportunities to reinforce the associative, performance goals he has internalized. These students should be asked to write with direction about, first, their understanding of what they have read of others' experiences and, second, their understanding of their own experiences, always within the context of the rhetorical situation.

Growth and development will only be possible for the performance-based basic writer when he has come to understand that his attitudes and misconceptions about the composing process form an obstacle to his writing development. Such a change will not evolve without planned instructional goals which develop strategies consistent with this philosophy. Instructors, paraprofessionals, and student tutors should all work within the framework of this philosophy. Haphazard or even traditional approaches which may seem relevant to all basic writing instruction may reinforce

bahavior patterns which do not contribute to good writing. All instruction for basic writers should be designed to develop good writing skills, not simply reactions to error patterns; for it is only through correct responses to the rhetorical context that the performance-based basic writer, indeed all basic writers, will have opportunities for success.

Endnotes

[1]See Lloyd Bitzer, "The Rhetorical Situation," Philosophy and Rhetoric, 1 (January, 1968), 1-14.

[2]Linda Flower and John R. Hayes, "The Cognition of Discovery: Defining a Rhetorical Problem," College Composition and Communication, 31 (February, 1980), 27-29.

[3]James Britton et al., The Development of Writing Abilities (11-18) (London: Macmillan Education, Ltd., 1975), p. 82.

[4]Walter J. Ong., S. J., The Presence of the Word (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1967), pp. 53-76. See also Thomas J. Farrell, "Literacy, the Basics, and All That Jazz," College English, 38 (January, 1977), 443-459.

[5]Walter J. Ong., S. J., "Literacy and Orality in Our Times," in The Writing Teacher's Sourcebook, eds. Gary Tate and Edward P. J. Corbett (New York: Oxford University Press, 1981), p. 43.

[6]Janet Emig, "Writing as a Mode of Learning," College Composition and Communication, 28 (May, 1977), 127.

[7]Carl Bereiter, "Development in Writing," in Cognitive Processes in Writing, eds. Lee W. Gregg and Erwin R. Steinberg (Hillsdale, New Jersey: Lawrence Erlbaum Associates, 1980), pp. 82-90. Bereiter's hierarchic skill system includes 1) associative writing, 2) performative writing, 3) communicative writing, 4) unified writing, and 5)epistemic writing. He identifies associative writing as writing which presents the thoughts of the writer as they come to mind with no recognition of the reader's needs. He identifies performance writing as the integration of convention with associative writing.

This, Bereiter claims, is the aim of traditional writing instruction. Communicative writing is identified as writing that is adapted to the needs of the audience, and the unifed writing stage signals the development of the writer's own perspective as a reader. Epistemic writing, which Bereiter claims is inherent in almost all writing, is identified as writing that modifies our knowledge during the writing process. Bereiter does not say that these stages are universal or naturally ordered. Indeed, he suggests that students exposed to different educational experiences might not proceed through the stages he has suggested in the same way.

[8]Bereiter, p. 86.

[9]Mina Shaughnessy, Errors and Expectations (New York: Oxford University Press, 1977), p. 223.

[10]David Bartholmae, "Teaching Ourselves to Teach Basic Writing," PCTE Bulletin (April, 1977), 12-14.

[11]Bartholmae, p. 19.

Practical Techniques for Training Tutors to Overcome Defensive Blocks

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Since Mina Shaughnessy and others have given us "permission" to view the basic writer with more humane eyes, even the most traditional teacher of composition is more aware of the feelings that block communication In fact, as Ms. Shaughnessy points out in Errors and Expectations, "it is not unusual to find among freshman essays a handwriting that belies the maturity of a student, reminding the reader instead of the labored cursive style of children." Because they have had such limited experience as writers, they are often ashamed about their handwriting as well as their content. Those of us who work exclusively with basic writers see countless students who are capable of competent writing, but who must first peel away the layers of defenses they have used for cover. They "hate to write." They "can't write." They had either a "lazy high school teacher" or one who relentlessly murdered their thoughts with her red dagger/pen. Perhaps the one comment that prompts even the most dedicated lab director to yawn is, "I went to the prom the night before the ACT." I feel strongly that a writing center staff should understand these defenses and should learn practical techniques to help students peel them away. When a mind is blocked, no tutoring really takes place.

Recently I had an experience that may have done more to imporve my performance as a lab director than a summer's reading in current composition research. I've been driving for 18 years...ok...sorta. I've never had a serious accident or a ticket. I've been "getting by." I have a lot of students who've been talking and writing for 18 years...ok...sorta, just "getting by." However, I'm not sure I've ever empathized as much with them as I did when I decided to take a traffic safety course in High Performance Driving to improve my skills. My husband has owned a T.R. 7 for five years,

and I've never been able to master driving it. My friends still think I'm cool anyway, but students are horrified. I have a hard time steering, shifting gears, working the clutch, and thinking about driving simultaneously. It's the way some freshman feel when they have to simultaneously think about a topic, keep the essay organized, and remain alert for mechanical errors. I am a competent, worthwhile human being, but I certainly didn't feel that way as I entered my class. I felt dumb and foolish and nervous. I had to clear my throat frequently; in order to cover that evidence of my nervousness, I did something very bright--I started chainsmoking. As my classmates began to arrive, I was amazed. I was not sure that I--a mature woman--could survive a day with them. (Since there were only three in the class, I survived.) The young man arrived first in a bright red M.G. revving up the motor and making whoooom-whoooom sounds. I decided, after some awkward attempts to talk, that I could dismiss him as the arrogant type who is "into cars." Then, of all things, a young lady arrived in a souped-up Trans Am, making whoooom-whoooom sounds. She was elated and began making conversation with the boy--in terms I could'nt understand--about cars and driving and what <u>fun</u> this course was going to be. Fun! To me this was frightening, even though the instructor assured us that we could not possibly have a wreck. At the end of the day, I felt like a wreck, but I had learned a lot, and as I pieced my confidence back together I discovered that my driving skills had, in fact, improved.

This incident sums up, for me, what we're about in writing centers: piecing confidence back together and improving basic skills. Since we use undergraduate staffing exclusively at my institution, I find it imperative to train our tutors to understand the defensive behavior of our students and to help the students overcome the blocks and move on to productive work in writing skills. This training actually begins in the initial interview when I ask each tutor how she feels about working with developmental students. I am always

quick to point out that this work can be frustrating and that it requires a special kind of dedication.

In an early training session, we ask a consultant from the Counseling Center to talk with tutors about Values Clarification. Since they are outstanding, intellectual English majors, they often need to stifle a sigh. However, as the session unravels, they find it truly enlightening and a very practical session. We begin by asking them to list, as a group, qualities that they value. Invariably, we get such responses as: punctuality, academic achievement, perseverance, loyalty, enthusiasm for intellectual pursuit, etc. Next we present an "entirely different segment" in the program about dealing honestly with feelings. We ask them to list some words that describe the students they are working with. They are usually slow to believe that we really want honesty but as they warm to this exercise, they could go on forever. Again, invariably, we get such responses as: lazy, dependent, lacks initiative, no-shows, no respect for course content, no enthusiasm for writing, etc. The third segment involves putting all the newsprint back up and searching for a solution to this stressful clash of values. Obviously, they cannot be honest with their feelings all the time or none of us would have jobs. Nevertheless, we find it necessary for them to honestly recognize these differences in values and then learn to understand and care about the people they work with. We also assure them that we will provide them with appropriate channels to vent their frustration in professional and confidential settings.

Regular staffing provides such a setting. Yesterday, we met for an hour and discussed the students they are having problems with. These are typical examples:

Tutor Problem: Leopoldo - a Spanish speaking student has great difficulty speaking and writing English. His teacher has asked him to work extensively in the center, but he is proud and somewhat reluctant to do so. When he does come he wants all my attention.

Group solution: He is a very intelligent engineering student. Discuss math with him and compliment his success. Make sure that he knows you are aware that language limitations make us feel "dumb" when we are not. Try to learn a little Spanish from him; exhibit a respect for his native language. Learn to get him started on an assignment, tactfully excuse yourself and work with other students, and then come back to check on him periodically.

Tutor problem: Susan is a sorority girl who is very outgoing and attractive, but she doesn't really feel that it's "cool" to have to work in the writing center. She's willing to go through the motions, but she is not really committed to hard work and concentration, which is vital since diction and coherence are her major problems.

Group solution: Appeal to her pride. Point out to her that she is (only because it's true) attractive and articulate. She can use her voice, which is well modulated, her eyes, her smile, and her hands to communicate when speaking. All of this makes her a confident speaker, but it leaves her in a bind when she communicates as a writer. If she understands this discrepancy, she may be more motivated to bridge the gap between her spoken and written English. Incidentally, it is fortunate that her tutor happens to be a sorority sister.

These are only two sketches of the six students we discussed, and we will continue to share progress reports. The tutors appreciate the support and suggestions they receive from each other, as well as guidance based on the experience of the Lab Director.

Another excellent and very practical channel for monitoring progress is to have the tutors keep a journal. When professional demands such as conferences take the director out of the lab setting, tutor training can still go on. On such occasions I have asked my tutors to keep a journal regarding various topics. This is an especially helpful activity when contact with the supervisor is limited. The journal entries enable the tutors to express frustration and/or exhilaration about their tutoring experiences, with the knowledge that the entries will be read with concern and that appropriate feedback will be given by the director and/or the other tutors. I feel that this

sort of communication provides an avenue for that vital support that makes good tutor morale possible.

Recently, I asked the tutors to keep a journal about "difficult" students, citing specific examples of tutoring techniques that they used to overcome resistance. The following excerpt was especially helpful:

> How to put a student at ease:
>
> Our center is relatively informal. The atmosphere helps to create an easy-going mood. If a student seems really uptight and nervous, I'll suggest we move to the couch or the easy chairs in the corner and just talk. Sometimes a student is eager to talk about himself/herself; that's o.k. up to a point, but I usually try to steer the conversation back to English.
>
> Sometimes, it's not a matter of overcoming defensiveness in a student. It's overcoming defensiveness in a tutor. I've had one or two students in the past who seemed eager to jump all over my explanations and tear them apart with insidious questions. Let's face it, occasionally I wanted to just cry! Then, I began to realize that the student's agressive manner was a cover-up for--yes, that's right--his inadequacy in English. In other words, it is just another type of defensiveness. Once the student is encouraged to give up those feelings of inadequacy and realize that everyone doesn't know everything, he/she can be one of the most rewarding students to work with. I say rewarding because this student has an inquisitive nature. Otherwise, how could he/she possibly manage to destroy our explanations in the first place?!
>
> One of the best ways to train tutors to overcome resistance is by having weekly meetings with the lab director and other tutors. This helps tutors let out their frustration over a particular problem student and also offers feedback on how to deal with that student. It's not at all unusual for me to wonder, "What would Amy or Sandy do with this student?" Keeping in touch with the other tutors and the director is important because it gives you moral support, added resources to draw on, and a good working relationship.
>
> --Michele Frankenberg

After several years of experience, every director has a list of do's and don'ts that must become second nature--immediately--to any tutor. This is the portion of our list that deals with defensiveness:

Greet students immediately

Learn names quickly

Recognize non-verbal signals--and be aware of your own

Don't just have a good layout and comfy sofa--use it

Laugh when it feels natural--it helps

Compliment, but never lie--if they're ugly, look for a nice voice, etc.

It's ok to make a little small talk

Let students vent their hostility, but be professional

The list could go on, and so could this paper, but I think I'll conclude with my favorite incident from this semester. We had a regular Wednesday "group" that just meshed spontaneously. Three boys and one girl started working on the same unit, and as they checked their answers, they actually started arguing. I heard, "Hey man, that's dumb! Don't put no comma there; it's only two verbs!" They were friends, so that was ok. Then the other two woke up and joined the fun. These students were so witty and attractive that we looked forward to the Wednesday afternoon "performance." They were terrific and we told them so. Of course, they loved it. I also checked with their teachers, and each of them made marked improvement in a month's time. I recently called the "leader" of the Wednesday Afternoon Players and asked him what qualities about the center helped him overcome any defensiveness he might have felt. He said, "Without a doubt it has to be the sense of humor. Your tutors recognize wit and talent when they see it." I also asked him what kind of car he drives, and he said, "A T.R. 7....whoooom, whoooom!"

Eva B. Mills
Stella Nesanovich

HELPING THE RELUCTANT STUDENT

The Writing Center at Winthrop College, a state institution of 5,000 students, is now in its seventh year of operation. Like other writing labs, it operates largely by referrals from instructors teaching Writing courses. However, attendance is voluntary, and all students, not merely those in Writing courses, may use the Center.

Whether students are referred or come on their own, they must contact the Center either in person or by phone to schedule an appointment. As you might imagine, because of the voluntary system, not all referred students follow their instructor's recommendations, even though they may desperately need help. Some don't follow through because they're too shy or self-conscious, others because they hesitate to come on their own, and still others because they're not aware that they can come without a referral. (We've discovered that even among faculty teaching writing, a few rarely refer students.) There are also those students who don't come because they have the mistaken notion that only "dummies" seek help. Then there are the procrastinators; they'll get around to making an appointment--sometime. This sometime often comes rather late in the semester, perhaps after the mid-term exam on which they've done poorly or after they've received their third D or F. Then we're swamped. Even with six faculty each assigned eight hours a week to the Center, when the crush comes, there are not enough appointment slots to accommodate the onslaught.

The solution? The Help Session, an hour-long workshop conducted by one member of the Writing Center Staff, limited to twenty-five students and devoted to a specific aspect of writing, ranging from such elemental ones as "Subject-Verb Agreement" to more complex ones such as "Informal Fallacies" or "Incorporating Quotations, Summaries and Paraphrases into Research Papers."

While we offered Help Sessions originally to handle the crush of students around midsemester, we've discovered they help to solve other problems also: namely, reaching the "reluctant student." We found that the student who was reluctant to schedule an individual appointment, with or without a referral, didn't mind spending an hour, usually in mid-afternoon (evening and morning Help Sessions don't seem to be very popular) in the company of other students going over material he didn't grasp in class or material not yet covered.

How did he hear about the Help Session? If he has eyes, he might have noticed the weekly announcements in vivid color and bold print on the flip charts posted inside the entrances of the Arts and Sciences classroom building or outside the Writing Center Office--both strategically located near classrooms where Writing classes are taught. If he's in class and pays attention, every Monday (or Tuesday) morning he has a chance to sign up on a sheet his teacher passes around. These weekly notices the Writing Center Staff sends out to all instructors teaching Writing. Though we prefer that students sign up, any student can show up at the appropriate time on the appropriate day. Although usually only about half of those who signed up show, the sheets give us some idea of

how many to expect. If the number expected (that is half of those who signed) exceeds twenty-five, we line up additional staff. The largest number that ever signed up was about two hundred-fifty; about one-hundred showed up. We had four sections going simultaneously. Except for the more "popular" sessions such as "Pronouns," "Commas, Comma Splices, Semicolons, and Sentence Fragments," "Introductions, Conclusions, and Transitions," "Paragraphing," and "Thesis Statements and Outlining," which are offered several times during the semester and almost always have their full complement of 25 students and at times require duplicate sessions, the usual number of students who show up is about a dozen--an ideal number to make the student feel comfortable while still enabling the instructor to answer individual questions and to have time to discuss the exercises students are doing in class. Sometimes we have only a handful. We've given the "Paraphrasing" Help Session to one student, on a tutorial basis.

You may well ask about the scheduling and format of the Help Session as well as the kinds of materials used. The week before classes start, the Writing Center Staff gets together and makes out the schedule, relying heavily on attendance statistics from previous semesters, class schedules (hours, days as well as dates) and syllabi, and staff members' preferences. Since we're a pretty congenial group, we have no problems. Before the semester is over, we'll each have taught at least six to eight Help Sessions, excluding backup sessions. And if a staff member's been around for a few years, she's probably taught every Help Session on the books.

As for material, we have no prescribed exercises. We try, however, to follow certain guidelines: avoid duplicating approaches and materials used in the Writing Center units and in textbooks in current use. We also try to use audio-visuals, usually transparencies, and to give the students handouts to take home. Each instructor is free to make up his own materials. When we first started, we had little choice; there was no material. Now we have materials available for just about every Help Session which any instructor may use, though he needs to check if there are enough copies of handouts to go around. Most often, we find ourselves using available material but adding or altering parts to suit our preferences or the particular group of students. Generally speaking, we often revise and change materials and methods of presentation, comparing our materials with those of others, discussing what "works" and what "doesn't work." We all tend to groan a little if we've introduced a new Help Session for which there is no material. This fall, for instance, we added three new sessions on Sentence Construction. Still, we try to keep our ear to the ground to find out what students and instructors need, and we find ourselves stimulated too by the need to find new materials and approaches.

As for the format of a Help Session, well, armed with the materials described, we meet students in one of the rooms assigned to the Writing Center which has an overhead projector. First, we take attendance so that, at the end of the week, we can send instructors the names of their students who attended along with the original sign-up sheets. Every semester each of us has at least

one student who faithfully signs her name to the sheet that is passed around in class--and never shows up at a single Help Session.

To begin the Session, we usually ask students what they've found particularly troublesome when trying to understand the subject we're discussing. Starting with their questions, we explain the particular concept. For example, we frequently talk about the differences between clauses and phrases, and main clauses and subordinate clauses, before explaining the use of commas. Students seem more at ease voicing their concerns during a Help Session than in class, perhaps because they know they won't be "graded." We then work some of the exercises as a class or as individuals, or both. At the end of the hour, we remind students that if they need additional help they can schedule individual appointments for tutorial help not only on the subject covered during the Help Session, but also on any subject they'd like to work on.

So far we've discussed what we call the "General Help Session," open to all Winthrop students, but attended primarily by students in Writing courses. We also have "Special Topics" Help Sessions, requested by instructors throughout the college, dealing with a particular writing assignment for a specified course. Thus, some of us have discussed "Writing Technical Reports" for a Business Administration course, explained how to take "Essay Exams" for a Sociology course, or shown students in a Social Work class how to shape and integrate library research and field experience into one unified paper. These sessions are scheduled at the regular hour that the class usually meets, but, instead of meeting in the regular classroom, the class meets in the Writing Center. In addition

to having the necessary equipment handy, we are also able to get students physically to the Writing Center. Sometimes, we pick up new tutorial appointments that way. Since we are invited often for a return engagement, we feel we're performing a worthwhile service. At this point only about half-a-dozen faculty at Winthrop take advantage of this service. We wish there were more, for we like reaching a wide audience. Indeed, with all of our Help Sessions we're reaching many students we would not have reached before.

The other benefits of the Help Session are many. Obviously, the student who attends reaps the immediate benefit of learning, let us say, how to paraphrase--or at least gets additional help in trying to master this inscrutable process. But there are other, long-range benefits. The student who heretofore hesitated to make an individual appointment gets some help. Discovering where the facility is located and getting to know the personnel tend to make him more comfortable. Seeing other students make appointments, listen to tapes, or work on units makes him realize that he isn't the only one who needs help. Frequently, we find students hanging around at the conclusion of the Session asking more questions and at times going over to the desk and scheduling an appointment--often to work in areas other than the one covered during the Help Session. Furthermore, if a student's attended a Help Session early in the semester, he may start getting the extra help he needs in time to avoid poor grades later on.

We also end up serving those students who do not need individual tutoring but who can profit from reviewing material already

covered or about to be covered in class, particularly at crisis points in the semester. For instance after the Department-wide Mid-term examination, we have several "Mid-term Review" sessions, and just before the Final exam, we offer several "Final Review" Sessions. The former is well attended by students who did poorly at mid-term, the latter by students who want to review the course material once more. (Most instructors do this in class, but often students like to get an additional in-depth review.)

Actually most of our Help Sessions are geared to material being taught at certain points in the semester. For example, we schedule "Essay Exams" shortly after the first essay exams have been given. We discovered, to everyone's chagrin, that students need to "do poorly" before they'll attend this type of Help Session. Scheduling it before that time usually drew almost no students.

Students, however, are not the only ones who benefit from Help Sessions. The Writing Center Director is able to maximize his staff's time. A staff member can handle two to three students per hour on a tutorial basis in the Center; in a Help Session, he can handle up to twenty-five. Quite a saving--one that appeals to administrators who must now deal with austerity measures. The staff member benefits because he is constantly reviewing and rethinking ways of presenting materials. Being stimulated, he often finds there's a carryover to his regular class.

You may say, "That's all very well for you at Winthrop. You have a professional staff and you have students who attend voluntarily. We have peer tutoring and required attendance." If your

students are required to attend, you obviously don't have the recruitment problem, but you may still have more students than you can handle. But what happens if you don't have a professional staff? Could you "draft" some of your departmental colleagues or ask them to volunteer an hour or two a semester to a worthy cause? If you have peer tutors, could you or some other colleague develop materials and train these student tutors? If you're lucky enough to have a professional staff, but they're overloaded, can you give them released time from regular duty to conduct a Help Session? That's the way we handle it at Winthrop. Whenever a staff member conducts a session, he receives an hour of released time when the Center is least busy--say, right before holidays. If he spends additional time preparing himself or developing materials, he receives additional time off.

Over the years we've toyed with the idea of calling our workshops something other than Help Sessions, but we've never come up with a more appropriate name because they HELP students, administrators, and staff, and they HELP us solve, at least in part, the problem of recruiting the reluctant student.

Linda Bannister
Univ. of Central Arkansas

Peer Tutor Training: An Ongoing Process

Perhaps the most crucial problem an effective writing center must deal with is the training of its peer tutors. Smooth center operation is dependent on a tutorial staff that is capable of handling situations they have perhaps never encountered before. Training peer tutors is, in some writing centers, little more than assigning working hours and telling tutors where the exercise file is. In this type of center, tutors are chosen for their writing ability and are assured all they have to do is what their instincts tell them. This "sink or swim" approach can produce good tutors, but a higher proportion of good tutors, and some excellent ones, can be produced with a training program that is an integral part of day-to-day center operation.

Without this day-to-day guidance, it is easy for a tutor to become just a walking grammar text or a speedy proofreader, in other words, to become exclusively dependent on handbooks and grammatical terminology. Of course, tutors should be well acquainted with the printed resources the center has available (texts, workbooks, exercises, etc.), but tutors must be trained to make use of their own natural resources; they must be flexible enough to respond to a situation rather than get locked into a method. Props are valuable but hazardous if a tutor is allowed to rely on them exclusively.

The writing center staff at the University of Central Arkansas is trained throughout the semester in a number of ways--some formal, some informal. Our presentation will address this issue, particularly in light of the Freshman Competency Examination which was instituted in the fall of 1981 at the University of Central Arkansas. This examination, a computer-scored, multiple-choice error

recognition test, must be passed before a student receives credit for the first semester of English Composition. This competency examination has placed a new responsibility on the writing center, where the primary focus had been on matters involving the actual process of composing essays. Now we are faced with a situation where tutors must function in a dual capacity: teaching students to recognize errors on a test, as well as acting as a writing audience.

This English Department requirement, coupled with our vital emphasis on the composing process, has generated a number of useful tutor-training philosophies and practices. Most writing lab directors would agree that it is important for tutors to establish a rapport with students that lessens their anxiety and increases their confidence. The basic writing student's experience with composition has generally been disastrous, and just like any other disaster victim, he doesn't need officiousness at the aid station. He needs practical advice--writing counseling as well as instruction. Helping a tutor become an effective writing audience and counselor is a delicate matter. Tutors, too, have anxieties --not only about writing, but about their ability to tutor. When I was an undergraduate at the University of Michigan, I was asked to be a writing lab tutor. I was, at first, elated, but my elation quickly turned into fear. Would I really be able to help anyone? Did I know as much as the director who had hired me seemed to think I did? What if I steered a student wrong or gave him bad information? Experience is a good teacher, but tutors can operate with considerably more ease when given strategic instruction and counseling. As director of the Writing Lab at UCA, I am responsible for the "formal" tutor training, as I called it earlier. There are three formal training approaches: English 3201 or Practicum in the Writing Laboratory; reading and discussion of articles on current research in the teaching of writing and the operation of a writing laboratory; and lab staff meetings.

Practicum in the Writing Lab is described in the UCA catalogue as a training course for lab tutors that exposes them to rhetorical and linguistic concepts that can enhance the teaching of composition. Copies of the syllabus for the course are included in your packet of handouts. The practicum is a two unit English elective offered every semester to students interested in tutoring in the Writing Lab. Students are recommended by their English professors, but they need not be English majors or minors. Literacy is not, or should not be, discipline-conscious, and one of the best ways to demonstrate that to the doubting student is to have her lab tutor reveal that he is a geography major. The course is about the business of writers writing--tutors examine their own writing, one another's writing, and student writing samples to educate themselves. They are attempting to make what they do instinctively and intuitively concrete, to understand how composing processes work and what makes them go awry. In other words, in the practicum I try to activate in tutors a composing process consciousness. The practicum meets for an hour once a week and requires the tutor to write one paper, two peer critiques, and two author's replies, and to create and prepare handouts for one to two writing exercises suitable for use in the laboratory. These exercises may address matters ranging from writing a good introduction to inflectional ending difficulties. In addition each tutor must spend 3-4 hours per week tutoring in the writing lab. This semester we have instituted an optional series of grammar seminars that teach tutors how to convey grammatical information (minus terminology) to students who must pass our error-recognition type competency test.

In this "theory in practice" course, practicum students write and examine writing (their own and others'). In a session on evaluation, for example, tutors learn about different types of grading: holistic, primary trait scoring, and

peer evaluation. Then they apply these various procedures to a set of anonymous student-written texts. One writing lab tutor gives a paper a B and another gives it an F. Is this a case of "I felt sorry for him" versus "God, it had four comma splices!" Usually it's far from that simple--as Bob will attest, these sessions are both heated and valuable. Tutors begin to understand how varying reactions to a text are possible and the difficulty of arriving at grading standards. Tutors also participate in role-playing exercises. One tutor might play an irate student who visited the writing lab for help on a paper which was returned sporting a big D. Another tutor might play the three-time competency test loser who has to get out of freshman English this semester, who wants to graduate by 1990, and who never seems to know exactly what her writing assignments are. These role-playing situations give tutors an opportunity to get their feet wet in a non-threatening setting.

The practicum is also the place where tutors debate the virtues of grammar instruction and the 5-paragraph theme, where they learn how to increase a student's fluency through free-writing and generative heuristics, and where they learn what rhetoricians have to say about activating a student's sense of audience. The Practicum in the Writing Lab encourages students to investigate and discuss composition theory--in the lab their discoveries are put into practice. If problems arise, they can be brought back to the practicum for further comment. The lab and the practicum complement and reinforce one another, operating in a cyclical fashion.

The second formal approach to tutor training at UCA, reading and discussion of articles on current research in the teaching of writing and the operation of a writing laboratory, is implemented by placing copies of articles for discussion on a shelf in the writing lab library. Tutors are given a week to read the assigned article and prepare for a general discussion. A couple of the articles

I have used are included in your handout packet: "Is Teaching Grammar Immoral?" "Their To Many Kids Who Can't Rite Good," and "The Ethics of Literacy." Articles that challenge preconceived notions tutors may have about writing are purposely selected. Since writing is, for most writers, an activity shrouded in mystery and difficult to describe, articles that cause self-questioning and introspective examination are most useful. I recall one session where tutors who had read "The Student's Right to His Own Language" debated the legitimacy of competency testing. They decided, by the way, that the distinction between sub-standard and non-standard was the crucial issue, and that it was practical to acquire fluency in the standard dialect as long as non-standard dialects were accorded their proper dignity.

Lab staff meetings are the third formal approach used to train tutors. Biweekly staff meetings are attended by practicum students, lab tutors on work-study, graduate assistants, and lab faculty. The early staff meetings introduce tutors to one another and to the lab. We discuss how to handle a student's first visit to the lab. Tutors discover that the key to a good tutorial session is the open-ended question. It is not the tutor's job to focus on errors and their explanation. The tutor learns to get the student to discover when his message didn't get through on his own. The student must be the actor in the session--not a receiver of a tutor's explanation. Tutors also learn the importance of getting a "writing profile" of each new student. The profile is a combination of the student's responses to a self-evaluation form, a diagnostic theme he writes, his instructor's comments or recommendations, and perhaps most important, the student's oral description of his experiences with and feelings toward writing. Tutorial suggestions are made.

1. Tell a student something good about his writing.

2. Don't try to deal with too much in one session--1 or 2 problems at most at a time.

3. Don't edit a student's paper for him.

4. Try to give a student a success experience each time he comes to the lab.

5. Don't let a student stay in a workbook too long; individual attention from another human being is essential.

In additon to instructions about procedure, staff meetings are an ideal time for tutors to describe problem clients (much like a medical practices examination board) to get the advice of their peers. We have had some of the liveliest and and most beneficial sessions when tutors help one another by sharing how they dealt with particular situations. A tutor of mine named Jill had had difficulty dealing with a student who spent most of his lab time complaining about his teacher. Another lab tutor, Ted, suggested she "get tough" with the student. Ted said, "Tell your student: Look you're stuck with this teacher; let's focus on something we can do something about--your writing." Jill tried it and it worked. At the close of each session I ask for suggestions that will streamline our operation or contribute to its progress.

A lab is made up of several layers of expertise that can filter down and up to the benefit of all. The lab directors are one layer, the composition faculty another, the lab tutors, graduate assistants, and lab students still others. Just as tutors and students build one another's confidence and skills, so do lab directors and tutors interract. Much of our lab's success can be attributed to this interdependence, but the key to a successful lab is an on-going training program that is part of day-to-day operation where tutors learn and grow constantly rather than rely on a bag of tricks they picked up at the beginning of the semester. The formal approaches I have described are important, but some of the most exciting learning in a lab goes on spontaneously, informally. Bob Child, an experienced lab tutor at UCA, will discuss that end of our training program.

The reason that good writers make good tutors is not because they can out armwrestle an adverbial clause or because they can go 15 rounds with a composition. These assets are helpful, but more often than not they are just fancy footwork--a defense rather than an offense. No, the reason good writers make good tutors is because they have a good knock-out punch . . . they know about voice--they have learned to be concerned with their audience, and they have learned how to adapt, how to be flexible, and how to perform. This is the secret to peer tutoring.

But here you run into a slight problem. You selected your tutors for their ability to communicate, but only in one area, and a peer tutor does not do his job by writing compositions. To function effectively a peer tutor must allow the audience fluency she has acquired in written composition to become an integral part of her verbal communication. This is not an overnight occurrence. Some tutors lack confidence, some need revision time that verbal communication doesn't offer, and others are just shy. Even the gregarious and seemingly confident tutor may be shaking in his boots at the thought of having to help someone in his own weak area--an area he has managed to cover up until now.

Any one of these tutors is likely to leave the lab in a state of paranoia and never return if he finds that he must go into it alone (one-on-one), or if he finds that his particular weakness won't be covered in practicum class until the last week. This is where informal tutor training becomes a necessity.

A lab director cannot conduct an informal training program. Informal training is peer tutoring--tutor to tutor. The lab director can become involved in th , but, more often, the lab director's role will be that of a sneak. The lab director will sneak in ideas during practicum--provide scheduling

that places shy tutors on the schedule with the more aggressive ones--subtly suggest that one tutor watch another who is adept in a specific area. The most effective method is to provide an appealing atmosphere.

This last sneak tactic--an appealing atmosphere--is a prerequisite for the other techniques of informal training. Since these are informal methods, they don't have specific course numbers or names, but for the purpose of this presentation I have labeled them.

Number one is the Floating Tutor. The Floating Tutor comes to the writing lab to visit, to drink coffee, to study. The Floating Tutor may, or may not, work in the writing lab; often he is a former tutor who has found the writing lab to be rewarding, friendly, and, most of all, comfortable. If he is a former tutor he will be experienced; if he is a new tutor currently working in the writing lab, he is finding a home and he is interested. Either way he will prove to be an asset; he will be available to comment on techniques and to assist other tutors. Since these Floating Tutors are trained workers and are in the writing lab regularly, they recognize that this is a work center and treat it as such. The writing lab won't turn into an alternate student union. Rather, you have dedicated, concerned people constantly moving through the writing lab to serve as role models for other tutors. The Floating Tutor is one of those intangible items that make a writing lab move smoothly.

I have called the second method Team Tutoring. In many writing labs peer tutoring and one-to-one tutoring are synonomous. One-to-one tutoring has proven to be very effective, and most of our tutoring is done in this manner; however, we have found that in some instances our tutors are more at ease working in teams. For instance: Tutor A knows what a preposition is, but finds that he has no idea of how to explain it. If he is confined and locked into a one-to-one

session, he may be too embarrassed to ask for help. The result is that he bumbles through prepositions with "Well, it's just anything a squirrel can do to a tree," or something of that sort. The tutee leaves frustrated, and the tutor stays frustrated--neither has had a learning experience. But if he is in a situation where Team Tutoring is accepted, he can go to Tutor B and get help. The lab director, although not in the room assigning teams to situations, can play a very important role here. Being familiar with tutors' writing abilities, the lab director can make observations and comments that will familiarize tutors with the resident expert. "Gene whipped up a super exercise on organizational techniques." "Katherine came up with a great new way to straighten out comma splices, you ought to hear it." These comments serve as confidence builders for the tutor, alert other tutors to the special talents of their co-workers, and, more importantly, they facilitate the same type of comments in conversations and discussions within the tutorial staff. One more step toward developing a community of writers!

The third approach, Tutor Apprenticeship, is one of the more effective methods of informal instruction, but is confined to the writing lab that has been in operation for at least one semester. If you are organizing a new writing lab, you will have to rely on Team Tutoring using two inexperienced tutors; however, after you have been in operation for a semester or two, you will have returning tutors who are not only trained but experienced. These experienced tutors will have developed questioning techniques designed to help a student find his problems rather than pointing them out; he will be adept at demonstrating writing problems and models rather than describing them. For instance, a tutor can learn to work through a revision with a student rather than merely tell him to revise. You, as a lab director, will find this tutor is more valuable as a model than as a tutor. Encourage him to work with other tutors; encourage other tutors to work with him. You will find that these experienced tutors will direct an

informal training program for new tutors which amounts to a Tutor Apprenticeship. The last thing a new tutor wants to do his first week is to go one-on-one. And why should you expect him to? He hasn't had time to learn much in practicum; he hasn't had time to familiarize himself with the library or the exercise file, and, most of all, he's scared. He needs on-the-job training, and you have skilled workers to give it to him.

The concept behind these three methods--Floating Tutors, Team Tutors, and Tutor Apprenticeships--is growth. All three techniques are examples of the cumulative growth process that has to occur for good writers to become good tutors. Like all growing processes, the growth of good tutors is directly related to the environment they are placed in.

As I said before, you, as a writing lab director, cannot conduct the informal training program. But you can control the environment: you can offer a relaxed atmosphere that makes a tutor feel he belongs there--you can practice confidence building and promote peer awareness--you can keep informal training in mind when preparing your formal training. In other words, you can sponsor the spirit of community among your tutors.

Informal training will be taking place all the time--more often than not tutors will be unaware of it, but you, as the promoter of this informal training, can see the effects of the tutorial staff working together and growing together--your good writers are becoming good tutors.

Through a combination of these six methods, tutors are exposed to such concepts as how to activate a tutee's native language intuitions, inspiring confidence as well as competence, establishing a relationship with the English faculty, engendering tutee audience awareness (reader vs. writer-based prose), developing questioning skills to help a student "discover" his own writing problems, making use of their own writing attempts as models of phases in the composing process, and using the center library and exercise file effectively.

These approaches are used in the writing center to educate its tutorial staff in a progressive, ongoing fashion. These training techniques are initiated and incorporated from the first day of the semester to the last. This "continuing education" approach to the instruction of writing center tutors has proven to be highly successful in producing skilled tutors who are capable of meeting and dealing with the idiosyncratic composing processes and problems that each tutee brings with her/him. In effect, the tutor training program and the writing center share the common premise of adaptability.

Suzanne Edwards
Lenoir-Rhyne College

Tutoring Your Tutors:
How to Structure a Tutor-Training Workshop

As a teaching assistant pursuing an M. A. in English at East Carolina University, I worked six hours a week, teaching one section of freshman composition and tutoring three hours a week in the department's Writing Lab. I had virtually no training for either task.

Despite my lack of preparation, teaching composition did not pose insurmountable problems. After all, someone, or a series of someones, had taught me to write. I discovered that by reflecting on their methods, researching composition theory, and using some imagination and common sense, I could survive the semester without too much embarrassment to myself and without completely wasting the students' tuition.

But tutoring? That was another matter. I had never been tutored myself; I had never observed anyone tutoring; and I certainly never received instruction in tutoring techniques. Needless to say, my tutoring sessions were less than satisfactory.

When I was appointed Director of the Writing Center at Lenoir-Rhyne and began to select peer tutors, I tried to devise a system of training them which would circumvent many of the problems I had encountered as a novice.

Conducted during the second week of the semester, the peer tutor training program consists of a six-hour workshop

divided into four, one and one-half hour sessions. Three to five selected students, all undergraduates, attend the workshop.

On the first day, the students receive an information sheet which explains the purpose of the Center and their responsibilities as tutors and offers general suggestions for approaches to tutoring. We discuss the guidelines in detail. The tutors also receive a bibliography listing print and non-print materials in the Center. I reserve time this first afternoon to answer general housekeeping questions and devise each tutor's work schedule.

The second meeting is devoted to familiarizing the student tutors with the support materials at their disposal. I pull from the shelves programmed texts, handbooks, and mimeographed worksheets covering spelling, grammar, reading comprehension, report-writing, test-taking, essay development, et cetera, to demonstrate the variety of available resources. I then show them non-print materials including a computerized grammar program and a videotape series on sentence structure. I make sure each student can log-in to the computer terminal and operate the videotape machines and tape decks. Students spend the remaining time skimming through the print materials and audio-visual programs to acquaint themselves with the content and structure of each. As the tutors examine the resources, I stress the importance of gearing assistance to the needs and personality of the individual seeking help. I

explain that some students do not respond well to workbook exercises while others prefer such independent, structured tasks. Throughout this second session, I emphasize that the resources should never substitute for one-on-one tutoring. Though the Writing Center posters and brochures invite students to come to the Center to use materials on a self-help basis if they wish, students rarely do come to work by themselves. They arrive expecting help from a person--not a workbook or a machine. So, student tutors learn that support materials should be just that--support for a tutoring session. For example, a student's responses to a workbook exercise may help the tutor to identify his grammatical weaknesses, thereby giving direction to the session, or the tutor may use a short videotape program as a review of, or reinforcement for, concepts covered during one-on-one tutoring. Used in this way, support materials can be quite helpful.

The third afternoon meeting is divided into two parts. During the first forty-five minutes, I offer practical suggestions about tutoring techniques and try to prepare the tutors for some of the situations they are likely to encounter.

Peer tutors are advised to develop their listening skills since the best tutors talk very little. Instead, the tutor should ask thoughtful questions which urge the student to talk through his difficulties and discover solutions for

himself.

Tutors are told that when a student comes to the Writing Center, he will complete a form which asks his name; the name of the professor who referred him to the Center (if applicable); and what he needs help with. Tutors are instructed to have the student write a paragraph if he cannot (or will not) identify precisely what kind of assistance he needs. The tutor should then base the session on the weaknesses that surface in that piece of writing. If the student has trouble getting started, the tutor should guide him through the invention stage of the composing process and then help him organize his ideas.

Peer tutors are cautioned not to interpret an assignment. If the student is required to write an essay or a report or a critique, and he does not know how long the paper should be, whether he is to conduct research, or whether he is allowed to write in first person, the tutor should send him back to his professor for clarification. Once the student understands the assignment, the tutor can help him prewrite, organize his information, or compile a bibliography.

I advise tutors to come to the Writing Center prepared to exercise all their patience. They are warned not to be intimidated by silence; they must not answer their own questions. If a student cannot answer a question you ask him, I tell them, try to rephrase it. For instance, if the student has trouble responding to the question "What is the subject

of this sentence," try asking him, "Whom is this sentence about" or "Who is performing the action described in this sentence." If you perceive that a student is only guessing correct answers, I add, have him justify his answer. Or, in another cautionary example, I explain to the tutors, when you are working with a student who shows you a paper full of sentence fragments, it is acceptable to begin by asking if he knows what a sentence fragment is. But do not accept "yes" as an answer. Insist that he explain what a fragment is or locate one in his own writing.

Of course, peer tutors often worry about being asked questions that they can't answer, especially questions about grammar. This is a legitimate concern, especially for undergraduate peer tutors who write well themselves, but may know few technical terms or textbook rules. I urge each one to become familiar with one of the standard grammar handbooks and to have it with him for reference whenever he tutors. But, most importantly, the tutor must be convinced that there is nothing disgraceful about admitting uncertainty, or even ignorance. When I confess that I consult a handbook as I grade papers or tutor students, peer tutors seem to feel more comfortable.

Next, I focus on the student writer's self-image. I point out to the tutors that many of the students who come to the Center feel insecure about their communication skills and discuss with them ways to help students develop more

positive attitudes. Tutors are reminded that they should always comment on the strengths in a piece of writing and commend any signs of improvement.

Finally, I review professional ethics, emphasizing the following:

1. Do not write any portion of a paper--not even one phrase. This is hard for beginning tutors. Like most of us, they find it easier to tell the student what to write than to find a way to help the student think of a more effective or acceptable expression.

2. Do not edit the paper for mechanical errors. This includes finding or labeling the spelling, punctuation, or grammar mistakes in a paper or dictating corrections. Once again, tutors are reminded to provide guidance and instruction, not "answers."

3. Never criticize directly or implicitly an assignment, a course, or a professor. Student tutors find this a difficult policy also. Their peers are more likely to complain to them or to try to elicit sympathy from them than from me or another professional.

During the last forty-five minutes of the third meeting, tutors work as a group evaluating sample papers and discussing possible tutoring approaches. This exercise has proven particularly valuable. Often tutors focus initially on a student's most trivial weaknesses. They must learn to pinpoint any profound problems and deal with those first. For

instance, one of the sample essays I have used is shown on the overhead projector.* Without fail, tutors triumphantly locate the careless use of "the" (instead of "they") in line two and the misspelling of "familiar" in line six. They notice errors in punctuation but typically mention those only as an afterthought and almost never comment on the insufficient development of ideas. The evaluation exercise helps them to set priorities.

On the fourth and final day, I give each tutor an opportunity to practice what he has learned by completing a written exercise and by participating in role-playing activities. Each receives an exercise sheet listing various problems a student might have. The tutor must explain in detail what he would do to help the student with each problem. In other words, the tutor must indicate what support materials he would use or what explanation he would offer. While the others work on this project, I call aside one tutor for role-playing activities. Talking with each tutor in turn, I pose as a student who comes to the Center with a problem such as one of these:

I don't know what Dr. Jones wants. I don't think he knows what he wants either. He's such a jerk!

I don't know why I have to write a paper about castle architecture. I'm a business major. What do I care about castles?

I can't spell!

I got this paper due for Sociology 250. I never was much good at writin'. I don't know where to start.

I was told I had to be here every Wednesday at 3:00, so here I am.

I want to improve my vocabulary.

I failed an art appreciation exam, and do you know why? Because she counted off for grammar mistakes. Can you believe that? An art teacher has no right to criticize my grammar!

I can't ever remember when to capitalize "mother" and "father" and when not to.

I just got this English paper back. The professor said I had alot of comma splices. What does he mean by comma splices?

I have to write a one-page opinion paper on mainstreaming in the public schools. Help!

Through role playing the beginning tutor can practice devising diplomatic responses almost instantaneously, before he confronts his first eager or perplexed or resentful student. It is a good idea if possible to videotape the role playing. Videotaping eliminates the need for extensive critiquing, for when the tape is reviewed, tutors see for themselves their strengths and weaknesses.

Tutor training does not end with this session. We schedule meetings several times during the semester to share successes and discuss problems. I also talk with each tutor personally at least every two weeks. Furthermore, to stay in touch with the realities of the job--to make sure I can do what I expect the peer tutors to do--I tutor several hours each week.

In closing, I'd like to stress that I do not believe it is possible or even desirable to anticipate and solve all

dilemmas for peer tutors during the workshop. Certainly we all learn by making mistakes, by discovering our own methods. But too many problems lead tutors to frustration and convince students who come to the Writing Center that peer tutors are unreliable. Some difficulties are avoidable, and by avoiding them we can increase the likelihood of meaningful learning experiences.

The peer tutoring system works well at Lenoir-Rhyne, I like to think, largely because of the training program I have just described to you. I am convinced that today any one of my peer tutors would manage much better than I did as a tutor eight years ago.

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*Prologue is Beneficial to Freshmen

Prologue helps freshmen become aware of campus facilities and how the operate.

As a freshman I feel that it has helped me very much, without the prologue I don't think I could have become as familar with my surroundings as I am at this point. It also helps you to get to know some different people of different classes.

The prologue leaders are very nice they help in any way they can, they also seem as if they are concerned about you and your ideas.

I feel the prologue system is great because it gives you a lot of courage to enter your new life style with a sound and open mind.

Lloyd Mulraine
Jacksonville State Univ.

AN INNOVATIVE STAFFING PROGRAM FOR WRITING CENTERS

Anyone who has directed a writing center will agree that staffing the center can be an annoying problem. It is the type of problem that presents itself at the beginning of each semester or quarter and remains until the end of the term. Two major causes for this problem are unavailability of qualified personnel to serve as tutors, and lack of funds to hire the needed helpers if they are available. In spite of this, writing centers continue to flourish and multiply because directors are willing to confront this problem head-on with innovative staffing programs.

In some writing centers, English instructors are asked to render service in giving individualized instruction to the students enrolled. Because English instructors are considered experts in the field, the idea seems to be a good one, but it has its share of problems. First, most English instructors' teaching loads are too heavy to permit them to do additional work in the center, and few administrators would be willing to decrease the teaching loads to allow the instructors to take on this added responsibility. Second, English

instructors tend to transfer the formal, impersonal atmosphere of the classroom to the writing center; so, for this reason, I do not recommend that the tutoring in the writing center be done by English instructors, if this can be avoided.

The idea of staffing the center with graduate assistants has been tried in schools where graduate students are available. In many cases, the results have been gratifying, but, unfortunately, some graduate assistants who are "placed" in the center are not English majors, are themselves not proficient in the language, and have very little, if any, interest at all in tutoring English. One graduate assistant remarked, after I had assigned her a number of students for tutoring, "I thought I was sent here to help make up reports and keep records; I'll have to find something elsewhere to do because I'm not interested in tutoring English." Of course, she was the exception, not the rule, but you'll agree that some graduate assistants would prefer not having to work at all for their stipends.

A very rich source from which tutors may be selected, a source that yet remains untapped, is senior citizens and retirees. At the University of Maryland, College Park, a junior writing center was established by the English department for third-year students enrolled in upper-level pre-professional university writing courses. The object of the center is to help students move more effectively into the professional world. Susan Kleimann and G. Douglas Meyers in an article entitled "Senior Citizens and Junior Writers--A Center for Exchange: Retired Professionals as

Writing Laboratory Tutors for Students Enrolled in Upper-Level Pre-Professional University Writing Courses," prepared a report on the activities of the University of Maryland Center. In it they pointed out that "The staff of the Junior Writing Center consists of twelve tutors who are retired professionals in their mid-to-late sixties." They "have had careers as varied as librarian, newspaper reporter, economist, editor, professor, nutrition researcher, public television producer, and linguist." Some of the advantages of the system, according to Kleimann and Meyers, are (1) these retirees bring their wealth of "experience in the 'real' world, in the non-academic world, to bear on the students' writing," and (2) "in the eyes of students, these tutors possess more authenticity, forcefulness, and objectivity."

Although the writing centers which most of us direct differ in emphasis from the writing center at the University of Maryland, the plan of giving senior citizens and retirees an opportunity to serve as tutors should be given some consideration, especially in areas where qualified retirees are available. Besides giving them an opportunity to continue their contributions to the academic world in a very useful and worthwhile manner, this innovative plan might help to alleviate some of the budgetary problems encountered by many directors of writing centers. In many cases, senior citizens and retirees will be willing to serve without expecting remuneration.

One of the major sources from which we continue to draw our supply of tutors for the writing center is our under-

graduate student population. Much has been said and written about the financial benefits, the availability, the selection process, the advantages, and even the disadvantages of staffing the writing center with undergraduates. Indeed, undergraduates have been and will continue to be the most reliable source of staffing for the writing center. A distinct advantage of this source is the peer tutoring it provides. In an article, "A Look at the Tutorial Method of Teaching Freshman Composition," by Frances Martin, the author states, "Peers can deal with the same type of individualized assignments; they can provide feedback at any stage of the writing process, and they can learn the skills of editing and revision." She also points out that "a concensus of peer criticism is often more influential than the single opinion of a teacher." Undergraduates tutoring other undergraduates in the writing center and discussing the writing process among themselves create an atmosphere much more conducive to learning than that created by an instructor talking at his/her students.

Since undergraduates constitute the primary source from which we select our staff for the writing center, it is necessary that we discover innovative ways to harness this vast resource in order that we might eliminate some of our financial problems, while, at the same time, prepare qualified tutors for our centers. Recently, we adopted a plan at Jacksonville State University to offer a course which gives undergraduate credit for working as a tutor in the writing center. The plan works

as follows: English instructors are asked to recommend their most outstanding students to the writing center director who interviews and selects prospective tutors from among them. Those selected and approved are encouraged to register for a course entitled Academic Performance Management LS301, 302, or 303. This course was first introduced by the Center for Individualized Instruction (CII) as one of its many learning skills courses. It has helped to alleviate some of the staffing problems at the CII, and we hope that it will do likewise for the writing center.

Students who demonstrate a keen interest in tutoring positions in the writing center, but show minor deficiencies themselves, are coached, then tested by the director before they are permitted to register for the course, Academic Performance Management. This course offers one, two, or three hours credit depending on the course number the student chooses. Those who register for LS301 are required to work four hours per week giving individualized instruction to center enrollees. Those who register for LS302 work seven hours per week, and those who register for LS303 work ten hours per week. All students enrolled in the course are required to meet with the director once per week to discuss approaches and problems, and to receive instruction in methods. At the end of the semester, a short evaluative paper is required. Thus far, five students have enrolled in the course this semester, and this accounts for one-third of our instructional staff. Already, students are inquiring into

the possibility of signing up for next semester. Academic Performance Management will not solve all of our staffing problems, but it is an innovative experiment that is working, and we are optimistic about its future.

As we struggle to provide adequate and efficient tutorial staffing for the writing center with our meager budget, or no budget at all, we are encouraged to discover new ideas and to put these ideas to the test. The history of the writing center is one of innovation and experimentation; without these it could not survive. Likewise, without innovation and experimentation, we would be unable to solve the problem of staffing the writing center.

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The Benefits of Tutoring for Tutors

It is generally acknowledged that writing centers benefit the undergraduate population, the faculty, and the administration of the colleges and universities at which they are located. But in what ways do the tutors, who typically come from the ranks of graduate students--those chronically over-worked, under-paid, long-suffering serfs of academia--benefit? What possesses these hardy few to dedicate time and emotional energy to tutorial work when they are already over-burdened? Though the generally small hourly wage is appreciated, it cannot be the sole reason for the dedication that most tutors exhibit. And the attitude of cynics to the contrary, neither can the primary reason for such dedication reside in the fact that tutorial work is yet one more item which can be listed on the graduate student's curriculum vita, in preparation for the all-important job search. Since tutors are the backbone of the whole structure, it behooves administrators of writing centers to discover the benefits that such work provides for the tutors, and then to make such benefits known to the graduate student population from among which they recruit. The general recognition of such benefits will, in addition, encourage those tutors who are merely "putting in time" to take full advantage of the very real opportunities that such experience affords.

The graduate student who has taught composition once or twice previously gains from tutorial work the freedom to experiment with a variety of texts and techniques, with an

eye to incorporating the most successful of these into the classroom itself. The Brown University Writing Center has a substantial library which consists of composition textbooks at both the freshman and the advanced levels, textbooks concerned with technical writing, textbooks concerned with scientific writing, textbooks which deal with English as a second language, instructor's manuals, handbooks, readers, and classical rhetorics--in short, texts concerned with both the practice and the theory of composition. The writing center's budget contains an allocation for additions to this library, and so administrators and tutors alike are on the look-out at conventions and in trade publications for texts that might be useful. Moreover, tutors often lend their own texts, which are frequently from courses that they have previously taught, to the center. Although the primary justification for this library--or, perhaps I should say, for its expense--is that it provides a resource for undergraduate students with writing problems, it also provides a valuable resource for the tutors. Indeed, tutors are encouraged to spend time during which no appointments have been scheduled by familiarizing themselves with these texts, comparing and contrasting them, determining their particular strengths and weaknesses. Tutors are encouraged to note in a log a judgment of the usefulness of a particular text for treatment of a particular writing problem and the response of the tutee toward that text. While such a process certainly increases the effectiveness of the tutors within the writing center,

it also provides them with knowledge of a large number of textbooks from which they can choose when it comes time to order textbooks for their next composition courses. They can thus make informed choices, rather than choosing blindly. Such a process would be profitable even for the graduate students at an institution where the textbooks are chosen by an advisor, for the graduate students would thereby be able credibly to suggest additions or substitutions to the list of texts from which they must teach. A more productive relationship between the advisor and graduate students, characterized by the mutual respect of colleagues, must inevitably result.

Occasional meetings are of course necessary for the discussion of administrative issues, but an hour or so should be set aside for the discussion of the successes or failures experienced by individual tutors in the treatment of particular writing problems. Such a discussion not only increases a sense of cohesiveness--that is, a sense of working as part of a unit known as a writing center--but it also provides tutors with a central clearing-house for new ideas about composition. Moreover, it encourages tutors to develop areas of expertise and to share their specialized knowledge with other tutors. As such, these specialists become resources themselves; a tutor who can make little progress with a particular problem experienced by a tutee can then go to that specialist and ask for advice, or can send the tutee directly to the specialist.

When a tutor who has worked extensively on a particular writing problem feels that he is sufficiently expert, he can choose to spin off a mini-seminar from his tutorial work. For maximum effectiveness, such mini-seminars should be directed at a particular audience. The appropriate audience for one type of mini-seminar might be suggested by tutors from among the tutees with whom they are working, and should take place at the writing center itself. One such mini-seminar at Brown University is comprised totally of ESL students who are taking a freshman composition course and who also have regularly scheduled weekly appointments with a variety of tutors; in contrast to the individual tutorials, this seminar is concerned with problems that the students all share. A second type of mini-seminar is comprised of students who are taking a composition course to which a particular tutor has been assigned, and this type should take place in the classroom. Because the tutor is working very closely with all of the students in the class, perhaps holding half-hour appointments each week with each student, he may be able to address certain problems which, from his vantage point, he can perceive as common to the class as a whole. At SUNY-Binghamton, the instructors encourage tutors assigned to their remedial courses to present lectures, create exercises, and generate discussions in the classroom as well as the writing center. A third type of mini-seminar is directed at a targeted segment of the undergraduate population and typically takes place at the dormitories or

recreation halls on campus. One population which has been targeted at Brown University is comprised of students who have resumed their undergraduate education after a lapse of a number of years; these students expressed a desire for a seminar on general research skills and a second seminar on organizational techniques. Another targeted population is comprised of students with writer's block; these students wished to engage in a discussion about the various causes of this problem, and techniques and strategies for its successful treatment. These seminars are selectively advertised by means of posters, announcements in particular classes, notices to the appropriate deans, and notices to the resident assistants in dormitories.

The graduate student who has taught only literature classes up to the time she receives her degree is admittedly a rare bird these days, but a number of graduate students are first given one or more assignments in literature classes, either as assistants or as instructors, before they are given a composition course. Tutoring will, of course, help the graduate student to prepare for the time when she will be asked to teach a composition course--a time which, given the realities of the job market, must inevitably come even to the most dedicated of literary specialists. In addition, the graduate student who is given the opportunity to engage directly in the process of tutoring writing will also be more effective as the instructor of a literature class. Her comments about a student's written work--be it

an extended literary analysis or a brief explication de texte--will be improved, for her experience in tutoring writing will encourage her to comment not merely about the quality of the student's interpretation, but also about general writing skills that the student will be able to transfer to other such tasks. The graduate student will thus be a great deal more qualified to help the student who has good ideas about literature but who just cannot seem to express them satisfactorily.

Almost every graduate student is in the position, early in his career, of having had no teaching experience--be it in the literature or the composition classroom. Indeed, some institutions as a matter of policy simply do not offer teaching assistantships. Such graduate students can benefit from the experience of tutoring in a writing center, for even though such tutoring cannot duplicate the experience of instructing a whole classroom of students, it nonetheless approaches that experience. The advantage of tutoring is, of course, that it is a great deal less intimidating than teaching, and so allows the inexperienced graduate student gradually to develop a teaching persona with which he is comfortable, before he must face a classroom that is full of bored, or perhaps hostile, or perhaps simply inquisitive undergraduates. Of course, the tutor who wishes to approach more nearly the experience of classroom teaching can develop a specialization and then offer a mini-seminar.

The one-to-one relationship between tutor and tutee

keeps the graduate student in touch with the needs of undergraduates, reminding her of the peculiar pressures that these students are under, and thereby enabling her to address with more success writing problems which are related to stress, such as writer's block. Perhaps even more importantly, this close contact enables the graduate student to have an immediate and personal sense of the progress that a particular student is making, and to share in his sense of triumph at improvement. Little in the teaching profession can be more gratifying than helping a student to gain an understanding or to perform a task that would not have been possible for him earlier, but far too often the instructor simply does not know when that leap has been made. In contrast, the tutor is in such close contact with the student that she is either actually present at the leap or later hears about it in breathless detail. Tutors at the Brown University Writing Center have been the recipients of telephone calls, notes, cards, and letters--all in order to mark the occasion of a break-through that is a triumph not only for the student, but for the tutor as well. The gratification that results from such a triumph can encourage the graduate student not only in her commitment to the writing center, but also in her larger commitment to the teaching of writing in the classroom. Given the dire need for accomplished instructors of composition, such a commitment should certainly be encouraged.

Just as the tutor reaps the benefits of tutoring--in-

creased knowledge of textbooks and techniques, increased effectiveness in the analysis and correction of students' written work, increased skill and confidence as a teacher, and increased empathy with the struggles and triumphs of students--a complementary set of benefits are reaped by the students as a result of contact with that tutor, whether in the writing center, in the composition classroom, or in the literature classroom. Such mutual benefits must be recognized and maximized by administrators and tutors alike, if writing centers are to function in as successful a fashion as possible.